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BY BARONESS VON HUTTEN

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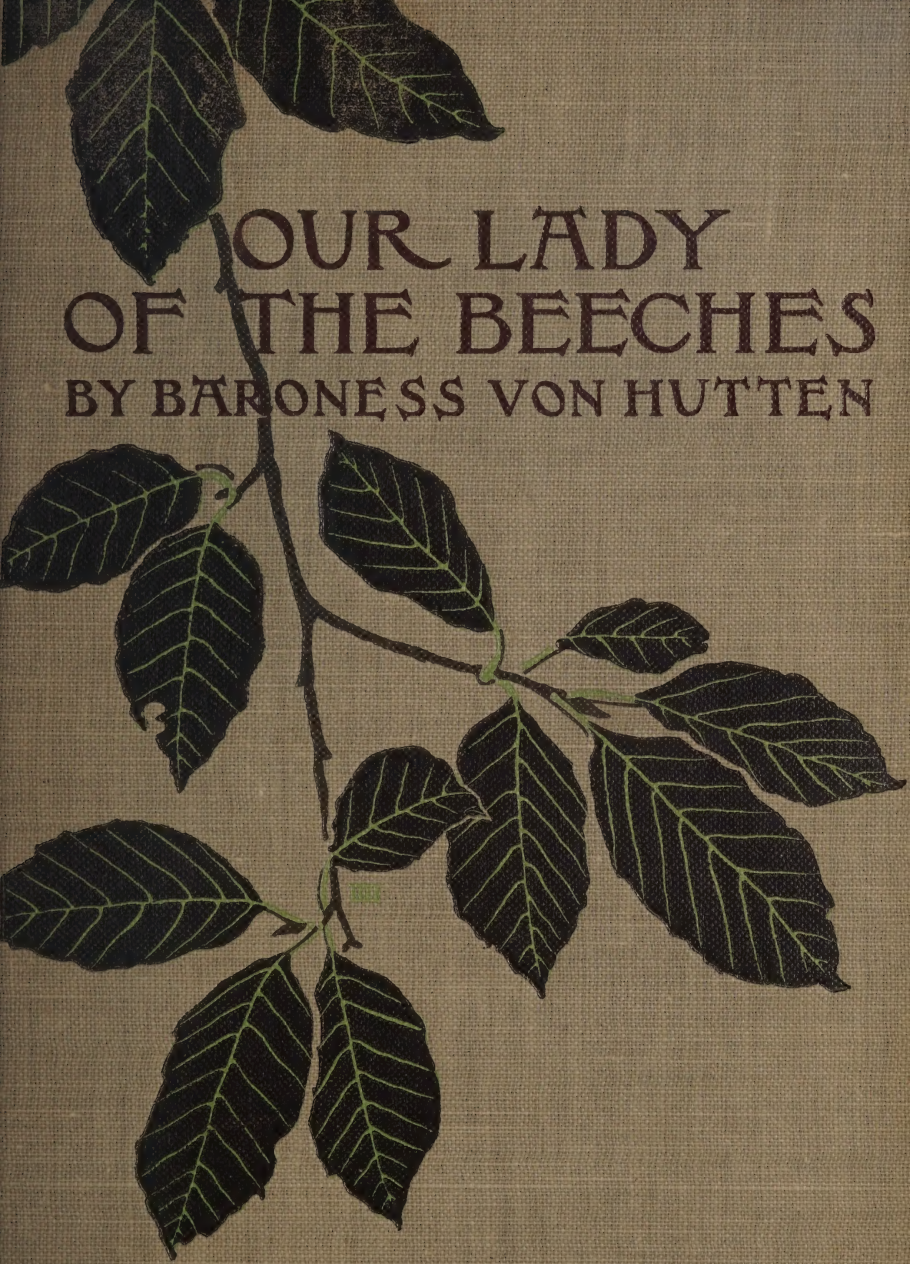

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BY THE

BARONESS VON HUTTEN

NEW YORK
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Published October, 1902

To

H. H. R.

WITH LOVE

PROLOGUE OF LETTERS

PROLOGUE OF LETTERS

LETTER I

In a Beech Forest, *April 7*

Dear Pessimist, — I have read your book through three times; my copy has grown very shabby; the covers are stained, — I dropped it in a brook; the margins are covered with penciled notes. In a word, I love the book. Does this justify my writing to you, an absolute stranger? By no means, I should say; and yet, safe among my beeches, I am not afraid of doing so. I don't know who you are, nor you who I may be, and if you should choose to ignore my letter, that is

an easy way of making an end of it. The direct reason for my writing is this.

The little pointed shadows of the new beech leaves, dancing over the ground, have reminded me of your shadow theory, and I have been wondering whether you really believe in that theory, or whether it is merely a poetic idea belonging to your pose as "The Pessimist." Do you really think that no life can be judged alone, "without consideration of the shadows of other lives that overlap it"?

This theory, sincerely believed in, would lead to a very comfortable philosophy of irresponsibility, and the more I study the Breviary, the more I wonder whether it *is* sincere, or merely an artistic point of view assumed for the occasion. Your chapter on Hamlet

is delicious — Hamlet as a neurasthenic, treated in a way that tempts me strongly to the belief that you are a physician. I wonder! Is n't it Balzac who says, "Les drames de la vie ne sont pas dans les circonstances, — ils sont dans le cœur"?

I have been sitting here, like Mrs. Leo Hunter's expiring frog, "on a log," trying to think over this theory in connection with yours of the shadows. I say *trying* to think, because, whatever other women may find their brains capable of, I much doubt whether my own ever gets further than musing — or even dreaming.

You say that if Hamlet had not been a nervous invalid, the trifling shock of his father's murder and his mother's marriage would not have been fatal to him, — such events being quite every-

day in his age and country. Then you apply your shadow theory to him, the shadows on his poor dazed brain of his mother, of Ophelia, etc., — and go off into incomprehensibilities that make *my* poor dazed brain whirl.

I have read and re-read the abstruser parts of the book, trying to understand with I fear little success, but against one thing I protest. You speak of nature, and yet you avow that your studies are made in a laboratory! Wise as you are and ignorant though I am, I am nearer nature here in my forest than you in your laboratory. The things that fall away from one, leaving one almost a child, when one is alone with trees!

The tone of your book is a curious one. It is not despairing, it is intellectual, it is charming, and yet — what

is the use of being wise if it brings no more than it has brought you!

Another thing. Why do you say that you do not know German? You do, for your translations from poor Nietzsche are original. Chapter 5, paragraph 2: "Great people have in their very greatness great virtues, and do not need the small goodnesses of the small-brained." Let it go at that. You are a great man, and do not need the bourgeois virtue of truth-telling. The last remark is rather impertinent, but it is one of those spring days when one grows expansive and daring, and, after all, the luxury of saying what one likes is rare.

So, good-by, Pessimist. Greetings from my beech forest and from myself. The small brook, much interested in the greenness of the valley, is rushing

down over the stones with the noisy haste of things youthful, and I see one cowslip in a hollow. I wonder if even Pessimists love Spring!

And if you will be indulgent towards this feminine curiosity about your book, which has charmed a woman not easily charmed, let me know just this much: whether the Breviary expresses your real convictions, or is written, as it were, by a fictitious character.

If you will tell me this I shall be very grateful to you, and in any case let me thank you for having charmed away for me a great many hours. Address:—

MADAME ANNETTE BONNET,
4 bis, rue Tambour, Paris.

Madame Bonnet being an old servant, who will forward your note, if you are kind enough to write one, to me here in my forest.

LETTER II

In a Laboratory, *May* 7

To my Unknown Critic, — Should I explain, excuse, give a thousand and one reasons why four weeks have been allowed to pass without my acknowledging the kindly meant letter of a gracious critic? A "gentle" one, too, as the polite men of a hundred years ago used to say.

But why should I answer? And why do I?

From a beech forest to a laboratory is a wide leap, a rude transition, one, my critic, that, if you could make it, would cause you to rub your eyes, and stare, and blink (forgive the unroman-

tic picture that I draw), and cry, "Wait till I collect my senses."

It is no wonder that you would be dizzy, for a moment at least, and think that some rude hand had roughly dragged you back from a land of dreams, beautiful dreams, into a dazzling light of stern, hard, unromantic facts. It is all very well to lie in your beautiful forest, and watch the lights and shadows play, and dream that you know the truth.

Truth is not found in dreams, dear lady. It is found, if ever, in laborious observation of facts, in patient, drudging study of nature. What do you know of truth? Do you not see that it is absurd, your calling me to account for my book? You are idling with the emotions that nature stirs within you, and I have studied that nature for

years. Not the nature only of trees and flowers, but the nature that is everything, — the spring of the universe. You watch a cowslip and fancy yourself close to the heart of the world, while we scientists crush every emotion that the real naked facts of nature may not be obscured. There is no passion in the soul of the scientist.

But I am rude, and after all it is only a difference in the point of view. You in your beech forest watch the effect of nature on the human heart, — not on the soul, as you imagine! We in our laboratories see the warring and antagonizing forces of nature; the world as it is, not as man loves to picture it to himself. Why, then, dreamer, do you ask me whether I really believe in my own theories? Pardon me that I forgot myself for the moment, and became too

earnest, perhaps impatient, but — you "wonder whether I am really in earnest!"

If there is one exasperating thing in the world to a man who has spent his best years looking down, deep down, into the recesses of life, seeing things as they are, and detecting their false coloring as well as the deceit practiced on the senses of this jabbering, stupid flock of sheep called mankind, — it is to be told that he does not really believe in what he has learned by those years of hard work.

Why should I pretend to believe something which I do not? Is it to enjoy the fancies excited by — But I forget. You live in a beech forest.

After all, everything is only a question of the vibration of one's cerebral molecules. They vibrate transversely

and one is displeased, — yours will vibrate transversely, no doubt, in reading this answer to your charming letter; and though I am bearish, I will admit that mine vibrated perpendicularly on reading your kind words of appreciation.

About my theories, dear lady, the little book you have read is only the forerunner of a much more comprehensive, and much duller, volume which is to come out soon; may I refer you to that? I will only say now, in two words, that I do believe that everything in the world is relative, and that every life is a resultant, as physicists say, of all the forces of its environment. No life could be what it is if isolated from all others, — surely even a dreamer in a forest must know that?

Only a small fraction of the know-

ledge of any human being can be credited to himself. Ninety-nine per cent. is the result of the accumulated knowledge of the generations which have preceded him, and of his contemporaries. So his personality is in part the inherited characteristics of his ancestors, in part the traits engrafted upon the soil by suggestions (subtle and unconscious often) from the lives about him. Upon him is impressed the composite individuality of many lives.

But I am talking too much, and I doubt not you will think me garrulous, as well as unappreciative! I admit the lie about the German, the reason being that my incognito must be kept, on account of the new book. As a rule, what you call the "bourgeois virtue" of truth-telling is mine. Forgive my roughness. Perhaps to-morrow — who

knows? — might find me in a milder mood, when I would tear up this ungrateful letter. But then, would I write another?

Who are you? I wonder what you are like, whether — But it does n't matter.

LETTER III

May 8

To the Forest Dreamer, — Since writing you I have re-read your letter, and I am struck with two things.

The first, that I should have written as I did to an utter stranger ; that to this stranger, who carefully conceals every trace of her identity, I, of all men, should have orated and scolded through eight pages or more!

The second point that astonishes me is that this unknown has told me absolutely nothing of herself beyond the fact that she once "sat on a log like an expiring frog," and that "she wrote from a beech forest."

Do you take my amazement amiss?

If so, I must in defense offer half a hundred or more of letters — all unanswered — sent to me by as many daughters of Eve, of many nations, for you do not appear to know that the Breviary has been translated into both French and German.

Some of these dear creatures have sent me pages of heart-history, and one or two their photographs. It is an irony of Fate that you, the one whose letter irritated or charmed me into a reply, should be she who tells me nothing of herself! May I not know something? Your incog. is at least as safe as mine. Though from the shadowy indications I can glean from your writing, your mode of expression, etc., I think I have made a picture from them not wholly unlike the original: you are not, I am sure, more than twenty-seven, you are mar-

ried, etc., but — from the security of your forest, will you not tell me a little of yourself?

LETTER IV

In the Beechwood, *May* 28

To the laboratory from the beechwood, all hail! And you should see the grace with which every bough sways downward, while the glossy leaves quiver with pleasure, and the shadows — my shadows — chase each other across the moss, and the cuckoo calls.

So I am a dreamer? A dreamer in a forest! Since writing to you, O Pessimist, this dreamer has been far from her dear trees. She has been at a court, she has walked a quadrille with a King and supped with an Emperor.

She has worn satin gowns and jewels that contrasted oddly with her wind-browned face; she has flirted lazily with tight-waisted youths in uniform; she has learned something of a certain great Power's China Policy that President McKinley would love to know, — and she has been bored to death, — poor dreamer!

Last night, near to-day, after a long journey and a two hours' drive through a silvery world, she reached the old house among the trees that she loves; and now here she is again, high on the hill in the mottled shadows at which you laugh. The lilies of the valley have come, and the brook is shrinking in the heat.

Just as she reached this corner of the world where she idles away so much time, a cuckoo called to her, — the

first, mind you, that she had heard this year!

Instead of turning money in her pocket, she paused, poor dreamer, to find a happiness in her heart to turn! The servant's explanation would be incomprehensible to you, if quoted, but what he brought were your two letters, arrived during the tarrying at courts, and forgotten in the hurry of arrival.

Thank you. Thank you for telling me that you really do believe in your book. Do you know, Pessimist, that in spite of the tone of the book, your theories are merciful? If every life is the result of its environments, and every character the result of heredity and surroundings, then people should judge one another more tenderly. Without knowing it, are you one of those who

have pessimism in their mouths, optimism in their hearts?

Do not be angry with me, a mere dreamer in a beech forest (do you *particularly* despise beeches?), for daring to suggest thus a sort of unconscious insincerity in what you profess to believe. Remember, opinions are merely points of view, and what I think comes to me partly from my grandfather the bishop, partly from my great-great-great-uncle the pirate!

Joking aside, why must my dreams in a forest be of a necessity less profitable to me personally than are to you what after all are only your dreams in a laboratory? God — and I mean the universal Master, not the prejudiced president of any narrow sect — gave us nature as a guide, or at least as a help.

Do you, among your crucibles and tests, find the peace and rest that I do here under my great, quiet, understanding trees?

And I am not a child — nor even an elderly child — of nature. I may be a dreamer, but I am a woman of the world with open eyes, and I know that what I see in the world I learn to understand *here*, far from its din and hurry.

The wood is full of cuckoo-clocks, striking all sorts of impossible hours, — dream-hours, dream-clocks, — despise them as much as you like, for you have n't them, poor scientist! Now the nearest dream-clock has struck twenty-three, which is time for lilies-of-the-valley-picking, so good-by.

Thank you for your letter. I say for your *letter* because the second was

simply a burst of graceful inconsistency. If I am only a bundle of molecules, cerebral and otherwise, why should you wish to know what I look like, and who I am?

Believe me, your desire is — let us say — nothing but an irregular vibration of cerebral molecules! and I am "as other men (*sic!*) are, I am just Snug the Joiner."

This is a leaf from the biggest, wisest, and dearest of my beeches. It has just fluttered down to me, and I think wishes to go to you. Good-by.

LETTER V

June 10

And so you are still to be a myth to me, my Fair Unknown? Well, — it does not matter. Thank you for your letter. You are a poet. I like you, I like your forest, I like your brook and your cuckoos. Won't you tell me more of them?

So you find my questions, my curiosity, inconsistent with devotion to science? Why? There is a type of New England woman who thinks that when a man marries he becomes a monk. Do you think that because a man takes the study of nature as his life-work, he becomes a monk? Rather, is not a woman part of nature? And

because I have written a somewhat dry book, am I to have no interest in things charming? I rather think my cerebral molecules are jingling and tingling over your letter as much as would those of any one of your tight-waisted lieutenants. However, to-morrow comes work again, and you will be forgotten.

So my forest dreamer has been to court, and danced with kings and emperors, and — been bored to death withal. I wonder whether she felt like Alice, when she told her Wonderland kings, "You are nothing but a pack of cards"?

At all events, I am glad that my dreamer is a woman of the world, and *because* of being that, fond of her beech forest. This all tells me much. And so you are "as other *men* are"! When a woman is as other men are, she has

developed much that most women do not know. She is a woman of whom a man may make a friend. They speak the same language, think the same thoughts, — and each knows that the other can understand. Good-night. Write me again.

LETTER VI

June 26

AFTER being called a "Fair Unknown," it is painful to be obliged to undeceive you. However, I must do this, for though my cerebral molecules may be charming, I am outwardly not attractive. I was born with slightly crossed eyes and large red ears, which misfortune many tears have failed to remedy.

I notice a startling amount of worldliness in your last letter, and as I fear you will no longer care to hear from a person afflicted as I am, I will take time by the forelock and bid you good-by now.

Ainsi, adieu.

LETTER VII

July 10

It is not true! Do you think that science is a study so unprofitable that I have devoted myself to it for years without having learned something of cause and effect?

No woman with crossed eyes and (Heaven save the mark) "large red ears" could ever have written the letters you have written me!

You are not only charming, but you are beautiful. I'd stake my professional reputation on this. Your forest, your kings and emperors, your cuckoos and cowslips, may be all a pose; you may be old, you may be Madame Annette Bonnet yourself for all I know,

but you are, or have been, beautiful; men have loved you, women have envied you, you have known power.

Deny this, if you dare, on your word of honor!

LETTER VIII

August 10, The Laboratory

Are you never going to write me again?

LETTER IX

August 25, BERLIN

No.

LETTER X

September 17

Dear Pessimist, — Did you think me very horrid? Did your cerebral molecules rub each other into shreds, — transverse shreds?

It was not nice of me, but I was not in a letter-writing frame of mind, and I could n't write, even to you whom I don't know. I was away from home, amid crowds of people, — people I don't like; I was worried and irritated in more ways than one.

And now!

Here I am again by my brook, which is rushing noisily in frantic haste, swollen by recent rain; the birches, dear butterfly trees, are losing their poor

wings; there are coppery lights on the beech leaves; the ferns are drying, and here and there the duskiness of autumn is lit by the scarlet of a poisonous fungus. Quite near me is a lizard's hole, and out of it peers a small bright eye. I like lizards. One of my happinesses is that of being free from little fears — fears of bats; of poor wee snakes; of blundering winged things. The only thing of the kind of which I have a horror is the creature called a "black beetle," and as I have never seen one, and know it chiefly through a translation of Le Petit Chose that I read when almost a child, I cannot say that the horror is very vivid. But this is absurd, my writing you about black beetles!

Your last letter, or last but one, was

amusing. I neither affirm nor deny the truth of what you say in it, but it amused me. You say, O Wise Man, that men have loved, women envied me. And have I loved any man, and envied any woman? You see, I am in a sentimental September mood.

I have been learning how I missed my trees during the hot, hot days, and how my trees missed me, — the days when a blue mist softens the distance, when the pine-smell is the strongest, the shadows the blackest of the year, when no place on earth is bearable except the depths of a thick-knit wood. Don't snub me by calling this poetical, for you know you wrote that you wished to hear about my trees and my brook, — which was crafty of you!

To-day I have visited all my deserted

friends; the dream tree, the wisdom tree, — a great beech, the butterfly tree, and they all looked sadly at me, and I at them. The face in the wisdom tree, a combination of knots and branches, cowled in summer by leaves, frowns at me to-day in evident disapproval of my wasted midsummer. A bird has built her nest in one of the eyes, which somehow gives it the air of the sternest of monkish confessors. Only the cedars and pines and firs are unchanged. They are tonic, but a wee bit unsympathetic. One great fir has a wound in his side as large as my hand, but he holds his head as erect as ever, and does not seem to notice his heart's blood oozing down his rough bark. I should not dare pity him, which is fatal to a true sympathy. I found a mush-

room, and ate it. Perhaps it was a toadstool.

You will think me mad, you will snub me.

I don't mind being thought mad, for I am used to it, and rather agree with the theory in my heart of hearts; but I object to being snubbed. So, to avoid that, let me hasten to snub you first. I saw in Amiel's Journal, the other day, a most fitting sentiment, which please accept with my compliments: "Science is a lucid madness, occupied in tabulating its own hallucinations."

Think me crazy, "tabulate" me, and go on making nasty messes in crucibles, — or are crucibles the soap-bubbly things that explode? — but if your laboratory holds one single object as consoling to you on blue days as is one of

my trees to me, even on a wet September evening, I 'll eat that object!

The sun is going down the hill, and so must I. Good-night.

LETTER XI

In the Wilds of Maine, *October 2*

Bonjour, l'Inconnue! Your letter has just been brought to me, and though Heaven knows you don't deserve it, I sit down at once by the lake, to answer. I missed you, cross-grained though I am, and though I fully recognize the way in which you, Our Lady of the Beeches, intend to use this humble devotee, I am glad to hear from you once more, and put myself at your disposition.

Your kings and queens, your people whom you "don't like," know nothing of the dreamer. They know the slightly mocking writer of your letter of June 26, — they know nothing of the beech

forest, nothing of the impetuous, natural, warm-hearted woman that the Primo Facto meant you to be.

And I, insignificant scientific worm, am to be your safety valve. Did you think I did not realize all this? As you never intend to tell me who you are, you feel safe. You are safe. No one shall ever see one of your letters, and I shall make no effort to find you out.

Dear lady, will your crossed eyes twinkle with amusement when I tell you that your letters have been the means of sending me up here, away from the haunts of woman, to rest an over-tired nervous system? Without the small packet in my writing-table I should have betaken myself to the comparative simplicity of Bar Harbour; *with* the small packet I came here, —

three weeks ago. I am alone, but for my guide. There are little beech-trees here, too, — a few, — many pines, a small lake, birds, and quiet. In spite of these charming things, however, I am not happy. The quiet gets on my nerves, and if your letter had not come to-day, I should probably have been off to-morrow.

Solitude is bad, I see, for me. My sins loom great among the rusty pine stems, my neglected opportunities stare me in the face, my utter insignificance is brought home to me in a way I do not like. You are too young to feel the reproach of wasted years, or you could not love your forest as you do.

May I know your age? And — do not snub me — if you have troubles small enough to be talked about, and choose to do so, tell me them. Advice

helps no mortal, but it *suggests* self-help.

Now good-by. I must go and make coffee. I suppose you do not know the smell of coffee rising among sunbaked pines?

LETTER XII

LONDON, *October 25*

So you will be my confessor, my patient safety valve? Are you not afraid of being overwhelmed by an avalanche of sentimental semi-woes? What if I should write you that I am that most appalling creature, *une femme incomprise?* Or that I am pining with love for a man not my husband? Or that I adore my husband, while he wastes his time in greenrooms? Or — or — or — Pessimist, where is thy pessimism, that thou riskest such a fate?

However, as it happens, I have no woes to pour into even your sympathetic and invisible ear. I am quite as happy as my neighbors, and even of a

rather cheerful disposition. Bored at times, of course, — who is n't? That is all.

In a few days I go to Paris, after a very charming visit in England, where I have met many very interesting and delightful people, among others the Great Man.

He is a great man, the Napoleon of the eye-glass, though I have heard that he is not Napoleonic, in that he has a conscience, whose existence he carefully hides behind a mask of expediency. It amused me, while stopping in the house with this man and studying in a humble way his face and his manners, to read certain European papers describing him as slyness and unscrupulousness in person!

Do you know England socially? It is a curiously anomalous country. Re-

spectability is its God, yet it readily, almost admiringly, forgives the little slips of its smart people. One woman, Lady X, told me, "Oh yes, Lord Y is my aunt Lady F's lover." On seeing my expression, she added, with a laugh, "Everybody has known it for years, so some one else would have told you if I had n't. Besides, she is received *everywhere*." So she is. An awful old woman with a yellow wig,—poor soul.

So you do not love solitude? And you miss people. Possibly I love my beeches so much, because I can never be alone with them more than a few hours at a time. Possibly, but I don't believe it.

My portrait has just been done by a great English painter, and I was greatly pleased that he himself suggested doing

it out of doors! The background is a laurel hedge, glistening and gleaming in the sun. The picture is good, but it flatters me.

I have been trying again to understand the more scientific parts of the book, but I can't! This will probably reach you in your beloved laboratory. Are your fingers brown and purple? Do you wear an apron when you work? If so, I will make you one!

Good-by, and a pleasant winter to you. Thanks for the kindness in your letter.

LETTER XIII

THE LABORATORY, *November* 11

PLEASE make me an apron! Could it have a beech-leaf pattern?

Thanks for your charming letter, which I will answer soon. I am just off to Paris, — *affaire de Sorbonne.* Don't mock at my laboratory, dear Our Lady of the Beeches! I have been as happy as a child ever since I got back to it. Forests may be all very well for the young, — I am too old for them and need hard work. Good-by!

LETTER XIV

December 13, The Laboratory

Dear Lady, — I sit by my table. The "soap-bubbly things that explode" are pushed aside, to make room for an electric lamp; I am beautiful to behold in the beech-leaf pattern apron!

I landed yesterday, to find the package awaiting me, and the contents exceeded my wildest, most sanguine expectations! Did you yourself put in all those wee stitches? I notice that the border is sewed on extra, — did you do it? It took me some time to solve the mystery of the strings, — it is years since I wore a bib, — but now, they are neatly tied around my waist and about

my neck. It falls in graceful folds, — it is perfect.

There is only one drawback to my happiness in my new possession, — the well-founded fear of making a spot on it, or burning a hole in it! By the way, speaking of burning holes in things, I burnt a large one, the other day, in my thumb, — luckily my left one. It hurt like mad, kept me awake two or three nights, and did no good to my temper.

Once I got up (it was in Paris, you know) and went out for a tramp. You don't know the Paris of two o'clock in the morning. It had rained, there was a ragged mist, the lights reflected their rays in ruts and pools; the abomination of desolation is Paris at two o'clock in the morning, — to cross-grained foot passengers. You were in

Paris that night, probably dancing at some ball — "lazily flirting with a tight-waisted" somebody.

I thought of you as I plodded through the dreary streets, and laughed at the remembrance of my first letter to you, — a pedantic outpouring of heavy-handed indignation. Our Lady of the Beeches must have smiled at it. Will she smile again at what I 'm going to tell her now? A carriage passed me at a corner of the rue Royale, and the lights flashed over the face of its occupant; a woman wrapped in a dark fur cloak. The idea came to me that it was — *you*. I wonder! She had lightish, brilliant hair and a rather tired face.

If I had been — well — several years younger, I should have followed the carriage; but I remembered my pro-

mise, and let it pass without hailing the hansom near by. The horses were grays, the carriage dark green — I did n't notice the livery.

Rue Tambour, 4 bis — it was n't breaking my word to drive to rue Tambour, was it? I walked in a pouring rain (good for a feverish thumb!) the length of the deserted street to 4 bis. Six stories high, respectable, dull, with a red light in the hall. And there dwells Madame Annette Bonnet, sweet sleep to her.

Where are you now? Lady without troubles, in what part of the world are you smiling away the winter in cheerful content?

Write me again when the spirit moveth you.

The night I visited rue Tambour was November 26.

LETTER XV

Rue Tambour, 4 bis, Paris
Christmas Day

The night you visited rue Tambour I sat high up in 4 bis, watching a sick woman.

My poor old nurse was taken ill a few days before, and as she has only me in the world, I moved from my hotel here, and have been with her ever since. I leave to-morrow, but have a fancy for writing to you from here, so forgive this paper, which I could n't wound her by refusing, and try to admire the gilt edges.

How curious that you should have been *roder*ing about underneath our windows that night. It was her worst

one, and I sat up till dawn. Several times I went to the window and looked out at the rain. I was very anxious and very sad. I love old Annette; she gave me all the mothering I ever had, and one does n't forget that.

The young doctor, hastily called in when she fainted, was unsatisfactory, being too busy trying to show me, in delicate *nuances*, his full appreciation of the strangeness of the presence in that house of such a woman as I; the nurse, a stupid Sister of Charity, made me very nervous. If I had known you were below, who knows whether I would not have rushed down for a word of sympathy? But now I am happier again, the dear old woman is nearly well, and her sweet taking-for-granted of my kindness to her, better than all the gratitude in the world.

Thanks for your letter. I am glad that you like the apron. I did make it myself, — every stitch, and a terrible time I had finding the famous beech-leaf pattern! Only please wear it, burn holes in it (instead of your poor thumb), and really use it. Then, when it is worn out, I 'll make you another. Did I tell you how old I am? I am twenty-nine.

By the way, olive oil and lime water is a very good remedy for burns. Remember this, as you will doubtless go on burning yourself from time to time! Good-by.

LETTER XVI

January 14, The Laboratory

Dear Lady, — What, in your wisdom, do you think of this story? A woman, whom I have known for more years than she would care to remember, has just enlivened us by running away from her husband with a man whom every one knows and nearly every one dislikes. The town has been agog with the tale for the past week; it has been the occasion of much excited conversation at two or three dinners where I was, and the different view-points of different people have interested me greatly. The retrospective keenness of observation of almost all those men and women is delightful; but as for myself, though

I have known many men and some women, and flattered myself that I knew more than a little about human nature, this case has floored me. Listen, and then tell me what you think.

She is a woman of forty-two or three, handsome, fairly clever, masterful, with a faint idea of metaphysics and some knowledge of archæology. Her husband is a good sort, with plenty of money, who let her do about as she liked, — even to the extent of blackening her eyebrows. The other man is thirty-four, with padded shoulders and a lisp. He wears opal shirt-studs, and was formerly suspected of a bracelet. He has no money, no profession, no prospects. Off they went one moonlight night, and as Mr. —— will divorce her, they will marry, and live on — love, in New Jersey. Do you think it

possible for two rational beings to live on love, in New Jersey? And yet they must love each other, or they would n't have done it.

The question and the collateral ones suggested by it have been distracting me greatly. When I was twenty, or even twenty-five, I could — in fact *did* — believe in the sufficiency of one man and one woman to each other. I no longer do, however, and know few people who could swear to such a belief. My sister-in-law, a clever woman, with whom I have discussed the affair, seems inclined to envy them, — she herself has been a widow for years, and shows no disposition to change her estate; but I am conscious of pitying them both. Are n't they going to wake up in a few weeks at most, and loathe each other? Tell me what you think?

Even assuming that Browning is right in his Soul-Sides theory, must not two people, as isolated as they must be, be bored to death by each other's soul-sides after a time? People rarely tell each other the whole truth in the discussion of such questions, chiefly because every one has a certain amount of pose; but you, woman of the world, from your forest, could tell me fearlessly your inmost thoughts about the matter. If you wish to!

I like to think of you caring for your old nurse, and I am glad you were in the house that night when the spirit in my feet led me to it.

This disembodied friendship has a great charm for me, and I like knowing of you all that you will allow me to, though I grant you that did we know each other personally much of the in-

terest would be lost. You are wise in telling me nothing of your outside personality, your name, your home, your looks, etc., but let me know what you can of your character, your thoughts, your feelings.

I would willingly tell you my name, but it would not interest you, and would change the whole attitude of things, perhaps disastrously to me. We would be friends if we met, you and I, but each would keep from the other something that he or she would tell the next comer. Our view-points would influence, not the character of each other, but what each would be willing to show the other.

Would there not be a great charm in being absolutely truthful to each other by letter? In showing each other — you know what I mean. The idea is

not original, but we have drifted unconsciously into the beginning of an original exposition of it.

I am over forty years old. I have never had any especial fondness for women as a whole; I am a busy man, with an engrossing life-work that, even were my temperament other, would prevent my ever trying to penetrate your incognito.

You are a young and (I insist) beautiful woman, living in the world, occupied with the million interests of the woman of the world; consoled on the other hand for the inevitable slings and arrows of life by a curiously strong love of nature and a certain intelligent curiosity as to things abstruse.

Granted, then, that I am (alas!) no impetuous boy, to fall in love with you and rush across the world to find you

out, — that you are no lonely sentimentalist with a soul-hunger, — why not be friends?

You say you have no troubles. Good! Then tell me your joys. What I shall be able to give you, Heaven knows! I am asking much, and can probably give little — or nothing, though one thing I can do. I can send you books, if you will let me, books that would never come in your way, probably, and that you will love.

And you will — do! — give me many pleasant thoughts, instantaneous day-dreams, so to say, gleams of sunshine that brighten my hours of hard work.

This has grown to be a volume, and if, after all, you only laugh at me, O dreamer? I 'll only say, if you must snub, snub gently!

There is a heart-breaking hole burnt

in the front breadth (!) of the apron, and a terrible tear at the root of one of the bib-strings. I forgot I had an apron on, and nearly hanged myself getting down from a ladder on which I 'd been standing, driving some nails in the wall. My sister-in-law mended it, and offered even to make me another, but I would n't have it.

I hope you 've not forgotten your promise?

Dear Lady of the Beeches, good-by.

LETTER XVII

February 1
In a small room high in a tower

WHY should I snub you? On the contrary I am pleased — flattered, possibly — by your letter. Another thing, — you have put into words something that I have felt for years. The influence of the character of another person, not on one's own character, but on the choice of the side of one's character that one is willing to show that person.

If I have a virtue (besides that of modesty, you see!) it is that of frankness. I think I may honestly say that I know no woman with less of conscious pose. Yet even when striving with somewhat untoward circumstances

to be perfectly natural, I am conscious of something more than mere justifiable reserve.

The side I show to one person is never, do what I will, the same side I show to another, and, as the French say, that afflicts me, in morbid moments. "Each life casts a shadow, be it ever so slight, on the lives about it, and is shadowed by those lives. The sun showing through a combination of blue and green, though the same sun, throws a light different from that which it throws when it shines through blue and red."

You will remember this quotation, though it is not exact.

In moments of self-confidence, which are more frequent than the morbid ones, I tell myself that one must respect one's moods, which are a part of one's

self after all. Am I right? Is this a bit of what you, O Wise Man, call so gently "an intelligent interest in things abstruse"?

This interest in one's self, in one's motives, is of course a kind of vanity, but surely if one honestly tries, one can learn to know one's self better than any other person's self, and one's self belongs to humanity as much as does one's neighbor.

So we are to be friends. I am glad. I am glad you are not young, I am glad you are a busy man. And you must indeed be busy between your laboratory and your metaphysics. I like busy men, and I am glad you understand so well the advantages of our not knowing each other personally.

Frankly, I should be terribly influ-

enced by external things. It could never be the same. If your eyes happened to be blue instead of brown, or brown instead of gray, I should be disappointed. Also, if you had a certain kind of mouth I should be quite unable to like you. Observe how gracefully I ignore the possibility of *your* being influenced by such trifles. Your great mind being sternly bent on molecules, you no doubt would not even notice whether I am tall or short, bony or baggy! But you will think this very foolish babbling, after the profundity of my beginnings.

About your story. I agree with you in pitying her. In such cases I am always inclined to pity the woman. And this woman has put everything into the scale against the love of a man years younger than she, as well as having

taken from him, at least for a time, the companionship of other men and women, his club, all his *menus plaisirs.*

As a merciful Providence in the mystery of his wisdom has created man polygamous, woman monogamous (by instinct, which is, after all, what counts), every man, unless his love for a woman is backed and braced by a lot of other things, the respect of his kind, amusement, occupation, etc., is bound to tire of her after a time.

Even backed by these things, how many a perfectly sincere love wanes with time!

Poor soul! I hope her husband will divorce her soon, and at least give her the legal possession of the lisp and the opals, before his love — under the removal of the host of gracious "shad-

ows" chased away by the stern sun of solitude — has begun its absolutely inevitable waning.

There is my opinion; take it for what it's worth.

I have just been out for a walk through softly melting snow, on which all shadows are blue, into the beechwood. The snow was so deep that I could not go far, but I stood under a big, knobby old fellow near the edge, and looked up the slope, up which the blue shadows slanted.

A wood in winter is very beautiful. The white quiet was not yet broken by the thaw, though the branches gleamed black in the moist air; all little twigs seemed sketched in ink against the snow. The sun behind me threw a red glow for a second over it all, edging

the shriveled leaves clinging here and there, with fire.

The snow will soon be gone, leaving the ground an untidy mass of slippery red soil, and I will put on rubber boots, take a stick, and pay a round of visits on the slope. The winter has been hard, and some of my friends will have suffered.

There is a pastel portrait hanging opposite me as I write, and I think you must be like it. I don't mean as to features, but in a certain air of quiet determination and knowing what you are about.

I forgot to tell you that the other day, in a certain old university town, I was taken to see a chemical laboratory. It made me think of you, dear Pessimist, and I admit that the retorts and crucibles have a certain charm, to

say nothing of all the other things, nameless to me.

I shall be glad to have the books. Don't forget to send them.

Since my walk, by the way, I am less fearful for the poor woman with the blackened eyebrows. Possibly she has great charm, and possibly he is too completely under her sway to tire of her. I hope so, and I have seen it, only in my case the woman was greatly the social superior of the man. At all events, they interest me, and she was certainly better and more courageous in running off with him than she would have been in doing what nine women out of ten — over here, at least — would have done.

It is late; I must dress for dinner. Shall I wear yellow or pink?

Good-night, *amigo de mi alma.*

LETTER XVIII

March 16

THANK you. I can write you only a few words, dear lady, as I have had pneumonia, and am still almost helpless. Your letter was given me to-day, and Heaven knows how often I have re-read it. I suppose that by this time you are busy hunting the first violets? Send me one.

It is an infernal thing to be ill; a worse thing to be ill and alone. It is just as well, perhaps, that I can't write, for I am in a state approaching the tearful.

If I had married the girl whom I once loved, my eldest child might have been nineteen, and, if a girl, sitting there in

the big chair with the firelight on her hair. I am growing old; I drivel. If I were even ten years younger I should want you awfully. It is hard to feel that one is too old for falling in love with the most charming woman in the world, — and you are she, of that I am sure.

Have you dimples, and blue veins in your temples? My nurse has come, and is scolding me for disobeying her. She has no dimples; she has an imperial instead.

Write me soon, and forgive all this idiocy. I am to have a poached egg. If it is slippery, I won't eat it. Would you?

C. R. S.

LETTER XIX

March 30

Poor dear! I am so sorry that you have been ill. Are you better now? Here is the violet, sweet wee thing! bringing a most cordial and sincere greeting from me to you.

It is awful to be ill, and it is worse to be ill and alone. A nurse with an imperial would hardly improve matters, I suppose, though, all things considered, perhaps the imperial was a blessing in disguise.

You were, despite your potential daughter of nineteen, in a dangerous state of mind when you wrote that note, Mr. Pessimist! But now, no doubt, you are back at work, at least no

longer shut in your room, and all is well.

This last month has been an anxious one for me. My poor Annette, fired with ambition as to window-cleaning, fell off a chest of drawers and broke her leg, a few days after I wrote you. She was in Paris; I—far from there. She is the embodiment of health as a rule, but she is over sixty, and to make matters worse, fell to fretting for her husband, a creature charming in his way, but with whom she had never been able to live in peace, and whom she left twenty years ago and more.

Her letters to me have been very touching. Years ago they had a child, a poor little thing born lame, and it seems that Père Bonnet's one good quality, beyond great charm of manner, and a tenor voice fit for the heavenly choir,

was his utter devotion to Le Mioche. I know no other name for him. Le Mioche lived only four years, but those four years, looked back upon through the kindly mist of something over thirty, have grown to be of paramount importance to the poor old woman. Her man, she wrote me, used to carry Le Mioche in a sort of hammock on his back, and then, while he worked, Le Mioche sat in a heap of sawdust covered with her man's coat, and looked on. Le père Bonnet was working in a lumber camp at that time, — indeed, they lived in a log hut built by his own hands. Le Mioche had a precocious fondness for mushrooms, and many times "mon homme" brought a hatful home with him, and tenderly fed them to the poor child — raw! The grave is somewhere there in the Maine woods, and several

times, of late, Annette has expressed to me her longing to visit it once more with the recreant Bonnet, who, "after all," was the father of Le Mioche.

It would be a pitiful pilgrimage, would it not? She was a high-spirited, handsome woman, as I first remember her. Now she is old and bent, this very longing for the husband she hated in her youth being a pathetic indication of her weakness. He, I gather, for I remember him very faintly, was a handsome, light-hearted creature who simply could n't understand her mental attitudes, and whom her ideas of faithfulness and honor bored to death. Think of them meeting, drawn together over the grave of Le Mioche!

I suspect her of having written to him, poor soul! Does this bore you? I hope not, for it really is "being

friends," as children say. My mind is full of Annette and her troubles, so I tell you of them. It is at least a suggestive story enough. I hope your friend who ran away with the man with the opals had no Mioche!

To-morrow I go south for a yachting trip. We leave Italy about April 15, and I don't know where we shall go, so do not hurry about writing, though I am always glad to have your letters.

Has not your book come out?

I will write you some time from the yacht, and in the mean time, *behüt' dich Gott.*

You signed your initials to your note, do you remember?

LETTER XX

On Board the Yacht X——, *May* 3

Just five minutes in which to beg a great favor of you. Le père Bonnet needs money, and I cannot get ashore. Will you send him $200 at once, with the inclosed note?

We shall be in England next week en route for home, and I will of course send you the money at once. I know that this is very dreadful, but I have no one in America to do it for me, and Annette writes, urging me to send it at once, as a miracle has come to pass, and he wishes to go to France to see her.

You see, I trust you, in giving you the address of this man who would tell

you all about me. I will send you the money in English banknotes, registered, care Harper Brothers.

Thanking you a thousand times in advance, believe me to be sincerely your friend,

W. Z.

LETTER XXI

May 20, THE LABORATORY

THANK you for trusting me. Père Bonnet has his money, and as I sent no address he could not write to acknowledge it, and I know no more of you, dear Lady of the Beeches, than I did before. That is — do I not? Am I not learning to know so much that it is more than just as well that I know no more? Thank you for signing the initials of your name, and thank you again for trusting me.

I am tormented by an insane desire to tell you my name, but I dare not. I know you would snub me, and pos-

sibly you might never write me again. So good-by. I have been writing to you for hours with this result.

C. R. S.

LETTER XXII

June 4, Among the Beeches

I am glad you did not tell me who you are, as I do not wish to know. But I understand your letter only too well. You are lonely, poor man of science! you long for a friend, and because you do not know me, you fancy I might be that friend. You are in that state of mind — or is n't it in reality a state of heart? — when a man longs for a woman, a woman for a man friend.

I too have struggled with the feeling that it is foolish to keep you at such a distance, that we would each of us be happier for knowing the other, but I am conscious all the time that the feeling is a weakness. I like you, I like

your letters; the eyes of the pastel in the tower-room have grown to be your eyes, and I like and trust them. But if I know who you are, would not half the charm be gone?

Have you never, before going to some strange place, made for yourself a picture of that place, and then, arriving, been almost ludicrously disappointed because the house was on the wrong side of the road, or the door not where you had built it in your imagination? The *me* you have invented is the friend you want and need. The *me* I am is a different woman, the result of a host of things in which you have had no hand. And I confess that the *you* I have invented is all that I want, and I should be disappointed in a thousand ways if we should ever meet.

No, let us leave things as they are,

dear Pessimist. I have been having a bad time of late: outside things have gone wrong; but what is worse, I am upset and jarred mentally. Even my trees cannot soothe me into my usual calm.

These lovely May days nearly break my heart, for some reason; the birds' singing brings tears to my silly eyes; I feel the terror of growing old. Time is going, — "the bird of Time is on the wing," — and I am doing nothing. I am doing no one any good, myself least of all. I am not even enjoying life. But this is what you call "drivel," — forgive it, and set it down to a touch of spring fever!

Thanks for the book, which I am glad to have, though I have not yet even opened it.

Old Annette expects her husband in

July. She is much excited, in a quaint, shy way, and leaves me in a few days to go back to Paris. Here she comes with a frightful concoction of herbs for me to drink. She is very wise, and she thinks the spring air has got into my blood.

Perhaps it has!

Good-by, kindliest of Pessimists. Write me soon, and tell me I am a goose.

W.

LETTER XXIII

June 15, Bar Harbour

Dear W., — Poor child, poor child! so you have it, too. Spring fever is what the old wives in Yankeeland call it, did you know? In children it may come from the liver. In grown people it comes from the memory. The memory of happy days is bad enough, but far worse is the memory of the happy days one never had.

But you are too young to know this. You should not know it, — should not, and yet you do ; and I have a feeling that your pain comes, as does mine, from the memory of those happy days never had. Old Annette gave you all the mothering you ever knew. My

grandmother gave me mine, and to this day I envy children with a silly, illogical, loving little mother who spoils them and cuddles them in her soft arms. Do you ? Have you children of your own ?

You are right, we must not meet; but we must be friends, we must trust each other. Do not be afraid of me ; I swear that if by moving my hand I could know all about you, I would not do it without your permission. There is not one person in the world who would not gasp with astonishment could he see this letter, but I mean it all. I *am* lonely. I do sometimes long, with a keenness that hurts, for a sympathetic woman friend with whom to talk, "the heart in the hand," as Italians say ; and yet I am not in the least a sentimental, or even a woman's man. Once, years

ago, when I was still in college, I fell in love with a pretty girl, and asked her to marry me. She refused, in the kindest way in the world, because I had no money, and she only a little ; beyond this I have had no romances. Is n't it rather pitiful, the baldness of such a life ? I could wish sometimes that I were the victim of a great tragedy. It would be something to remember, something for which to deserve the self-pity that wells up to my very eyes sometimes.

Are you laughing at me? Is Our Lady of the Beeches in one of her mocking moods ? If so, so be it. We are friends, and surely friends can bear a bit of chaff.

If you have not yet read the book, do not, I beg of you. It is sincerely and honestly written, but it is the work

of a materialist, and, I now see, no reading for a young woman of your character.

Why I was sent into the world with this taste and talent for iconoclastics, that which made me must know. I am counted a wise man, I have a string of letters after my name, I have made two discoveries considered important; but, after all, what good has it done me ?

And such reading as you could do on my lines, dear lady, at best superficial and imperfectly understood, can do you only harm. May I know whether you believe in a God ? If you do, as I hope, read nothing to shake that belief.

The Pessimist as a preacher !

I have been in this delightful place for ten days, and shall stay all summer, boating, riding, and loafing.

The air, a rare combination of sea and mountain, is delicious, the colors equal to those of Italy, and the house where I am stopping almost a bachelor's hall, though my friend is married. His wife plays golf all day, and when the season is in full swing will dance all night, so we here are subject to but little control.

I went to a dinner last night, at which the conversation turned, strangely enough, on American women who have married foreigners. Nearly every one present knew of some such case, while of course several were well known to us all. I wondered whether any of the talkers knew Our Lady of the Beeches.

My silence drawing attention to me, one man asked, laughing : —

"And you, S——, don't you know any such fair deserter ?"

Almost involuntarily I answered, "Yes, the most charming woman I ever knew married in Europe." And then the charming women present besieged me with questions, which I did not answer.

I noticed, among all the examples of international marriages cited, that not one was said to be conspicuously happy. I wonder why women will not learn that to cut themselves off from all early associations, after the age for making close friends, is a dangerous thing. Women need friends, acquaintances will not do ; and a girl brought up in one country can never — love her husband as she may — learn to be of another country.

But I am lecturing. Forgive me, you who know from experience whether I am right or wrong.

Write me soon again. Send your letter to Box 71, Bar Harbour, Maine. Faithfully your friend,

C. R. S.

LETTER XXIV

June 27, LONDON

YESTERDAY I had a tremendous shock. A man whom I have known for years, and liked, a friend of my husband, I had thought a friend of mine, asked me to go away with him.

I have never flirted with him, I knew that he was more or less in love with me, but I had thought that he was a gentleman. He has been mixed up in my life a great deal of late, and once or twice has shown me a kind of tacit sympathy that I could not refuse. That is all. Yesterday he dared, in perfectly cold blood, to propose to me to leave my husband for him.

He began by telling me I had a great deal of self-control, and you will see how innocent I was when I tell you I did not know what he meant. Then he asked me point-blank whether I had not known that he loved me.

I answered honestly that I had known it, and that I was very grateful to him for never letting his feelings become an obstacle to our pleasant friendship.

He informed me thereupon that when a man loves a woman he never is mistaken about her feeling for him, that he knew I loved him, and that the time had come when neither of us could stand the strain of present circumstances any longer.

His strength of conviction was such that I was utterly aghast for a minute, and then, the funny side of it suddenly appearing to me, I burst into what he

called "a roar" of laughter. It was all so absurd.

When at last he stopped talking, I told him very gently that he was utterly wrong, that I was not in the least in love with him, and that I must beg of him not to force me to see him again until he had come to his senses. He left me without a word, and I have been growing angrier ever since.

There must be a strain of vulgarity in me, for I should like at this moment nothing better than to box his ears. The worst of it is, Pessimist, that I am sure the wretch is somewhere cursing my *self-control.*

The belief that I care for him appears to be too deep-rooted to be jerked out so suddenly, and it seems that several of my innocent words and acts have been construed into a tacit acceptance

of his passion. He called it his *passion!*

My unfortunate burst of laughter he no doubt took on consideration as the result of hysterical joy, and here I am, angry as I have been but a few times in my life, and — perfectly helpless. How can I make the creature believe that I never gave him a thought of that kind — that I looked on him as a good sort, not too clever, and rather attractively faithful to his mute adoration of my charming self! However —

So you are at dear old Bar Harbor! Why spell it with a "u"? Anything so essentially, deliciously American surely ought to be writ in the American way. I have been there, and love it.

When I was very young I was in love there, and that was enchanting.

The object of my love was a hand-

some youth with blue eyes, and, oh rapture! a budding mustache. He had a great deal of money, and his attentions, although I was in reality too young to be the recipient of such things, were not discouraged by my only relative, a cousin, and for a time all went well, and we were engaged, subject to certain restrictions.

The following winter I had the measles and was taken South to recuperate. My young body, alas, recuperated no sooner than did my young heart, and poor Annette's was the task of seeing him when he came to see me in the early spring. Vanity notwithstanding, I am compelled to admit that he was not crushed by the blow, and a few years ago I met him at Venice with his wife, a very pretty girl with a curl in the middle of her forehead.

Does one still go to Duck Brook and Bubble Pond? Dear Bar Harbor, how blue the air is there, and how strong the salt smell!

No, I have no children; and will you think me very awful for being glad I have not?

Your moralizing on international marriages amuses me. How do you know, dear Pessimist? for you do know a great deal. You are not entirely right, however. Now the reason, I think, that such marriages are apt to be unhappy is that they are nine times out ten merely *mariages de convenance.* A very rich girl marries a more or less needy nobleman (and say what one will, European men as a whole greatly prefer marrying women of their own race); she lives with him the life he is used to and likes, and takes up his inter-

ests. If they are in love with each other in such a way that it lasts, of course all is well; but usually at least one of them tires, and then no old associations, no common relations and friends binding them together, the woman, do what she will, *compares* the two countries, and grows homesick. It is a dangerous experiment, as you say, though there are some exceptions.

The happiest people I know in the world are an American girl and her Dutch husband. The girl was not rich, the man had but little money, and yet they are perfectly happy; the necessary bond in this case being a passion for tulips. The girl was always crazy about flowers, and the man is one of the most successful amateur "tulipists" in Holland. He directed her love for flowers in general to tulips in particular, and

there they live among acres of garden, like an unmolested Adam and Eve.

So you have never married. I thought you had not, even before the letter after your illness. I have been married for some years. My husband is very good to me; I can't imagine a better husband, in many ways.

I tell you this that you may imagine me no Griselda, after my occasional wails. The unhappiness I have, *amigo*, comes from within. Do not pity me too much.

To-day, or rather this evening, I am savage with the whole world, most of all with myself for paying so little heed to the moods and thoughts of what I considered a harmless little man. I should like to fly off to a wilderness and revert to a savage life. I wish my only thought was to have enough to eat. I

wish I had a nice comforting vice, such as smoking, or bridge. Nothing keeps a woman out of mischief so well as a pet vice.

I have not read the book, but I think you had better let me. The God I believe in is the God of no creed, and of infinite mercy. I do not fear Him. Your book would not shake me. No book in the world could, though I am not at all pious.

Annette had a mass read to-day, in the I fear vain hope of receiving a letter from her husband, who has not once written since you sent him the money. Poor old woman!

I trust the money reached you safely through the Harpers?

Good-by. I like the thought that you are my friend. God bless you.

W.

IN THE WOODS

I

"'La vie est brève, un peu d'espoir,'" Leduc sang as he came slowly up the slope, the letter in his hand: "'Un peu de rêve, et puis bonsoir!'"

Saxe rolled over, brushing the pine needles from his coat. "Hurry up!" he called.

Leduc's vivid blue eyes twinkled under their wrinkled lids as he put the letter into Saxe's outstretched hand.

"M'sieu is pretty old to be so excited by a letter from a woman. Pretty old!"

"Old? I? I am twenty-five this evening in feelings and in appetite. Did you get the coffee?"

Leduc grunted. "Yes an' the dev-

iled ham, an' the whiskey. Leduc tired. Leduc must sleep two-three minutes, — then he make the fire."

Throwing himself face downward on the fragrant earth, he was silent.

Saxe watched him, an amused smile in his eyes.

"The facile sleep of the man of rudimentary conscience and a good digestion. The man is to be envied, — by another than me, however."

The letter expected for days lay on Saxe's updrawn knees: a long, slim white envelope, addressed in a very clear, unadorned handwriting, "To the Author of The Pessimist's Breviary," and re-addressed by a clerk in his publisher's office. He turned it over; the blue seal was small and perfect.

"When I held out my hand to take it," the man mused, "it trembled. I

both felt and saw it tremble. Once more, Richard Saxe, I ask you, on your honor, are you in love with her?"

A snore from Leduc being the only answer to his question, he took a knife from his pocket and carefully cut the letter open.

It was five o'clock in the evening, and the ochre seams in the big pines about him were crimson in the sunlight. The ground, modulating gently to a little blue lake, was bare of grass, warm with rich tints of brown, and swept with swift shadows as the wind stirred the branches high above. To the left stood a small cabin, flanked by a dingy tent.

Saxe read his letter slowly, often going back and re-studying a phrase, his expression changing curiously in his perfect freedom from observation. His face was that of a man close on middle

age, with a handsome nose and chin, small brilliant eyes that shone behind rimless glasses, a broad, well-modeled brow shadowed by a lock of stiff brown hair, and a heavy, short-cut mustache streaked with gray. His muscular throat, bared by a low-collared flannel shirt, lent him a youthful air that he would have lacked in more civilized clothes, and his clever-looking hands, though brown, were distinctly the hands of a student. Once he laid down the letter, and taking off his eyeglasses with a little downward swoop of three fingers, opened and closed his eyes several times in rapid succession, in a way evidently characteristic, before putting them on again.

"Beast!" he said aloud once, and then a quick smile at himself flashed two dimples in his cheeks.

At last Leduc grunted, rolled over, and awoke. "Bien, bien, bien, bien," he muttered, yawning. "I dream M'sieu have the fire all built for poor old Leduc!"

"Leduc had better hurry and build the fire for poor old M'sieu. The trout is cleaned, and in the pail there. I'll attend to the coffee while you fry him."

Leduc paused, looking down at him shrewdly. "De bonnes nouvelles, M'sieu?"

"Yes. Very good. More than — Get to work, man."

"When I was the age of M'sieu, there was a little English girl in Bangor, — pretty to eat, I tell you. My God, how I love that girl, — when I was the age of M'sieu!"

"Why did n't you marry her?"

asked Saxe, rising too, and walking the old man toward the cabin.

"Oh, — she was married, — and me, too. Telle est la vie. Rotten old world!"

"Rotten old Leduc! I forgot you were a Frenchman. Unmarried Frenchmen never fall in love with girls, do they?"

Leduc scrutinized his innocent face sharply, and then, satisfied of his good faith, "No, we marries them, but we do not love them. Oh no. I too have passed that way. I too married a girl. Là, là, — where is that trout?"

He disappeared behind the cabin, and a few minutes later Saxe heard him burst into a shout of laughter, and exclaim: "Holy Mother of God, he has cut off its head!"

Saxe apologized. He *had* cut the

trout's head off, half through ignorance, half through absent-mindedness, and felt thoroughly ashamed of himself. He was feeling very happy, moreover, and quite willing to apologize to nearly any one for nearly anything.

As he poured out a glass of whiskey, he smiled at it absently and said to Leduc: "Nothing like a 'nice comforting vice,' is there?"

"Vice? M'sieu! But, yes, M'sieu is right, only I should choose not whiskey. Whiskey make a brute of a man — a pig."

"I may say without vanity that neither would it be my choice. By Jove, smell that coffee!"

The fire, burnt down to a steady glow, cast a faint circle of beautiful light around the two men sitting by it. The fish, nailed to a strip of board, was

half cooked; the fragrance of the coffee mingled with the pine smell as a cone crackled from time to time, sending a spray of sparks into the closing-in darkness. An owl hooted. Saxe sat with his arms clasped about his knees, his eyeglasses glinting in the firelight, his forehead white under the lock of hair. Leduc, a picturesque enough figure, knelt close in the glow, shifting the board to which the decapitated trout, ruined, according to him, for broiling, was nailed. Suddenly the old man turned, and dropped the board full in the fire.

"Can you kindly show us the way to Lake Silver Camp?"

The speaker stood close by him, her face in the light, his back to it. "Lake Silver?"

"I am looking for a guide there, Lucien Bonnet."

Leduc rose. "Sacristi, Annette!"

Saxe sat perfectly still. It all seemed to have happened before. The burning fish hissed, the coffee boiled over. Leduc and the little woman stood staring at each other; then she put her hand to her face and burst into tears.

Saxe rose and left the firelight.

She was standing just outside its radius, and as he approached, a sudden leap of the flame fed by the pine board flashed over her.

"Let us — leave them alone, poor things," he said.

The boat was drawn up in the sand, and they sat down on it in silence.

At last she said, "Is it really he, — Bonnet?"

"Yes. But — I knew him — they all do hereabouts — as Leduc. You must believe that."

"I must believe that? What do you mean?" she returned, struck by his tone.

"I mean that I did n't know. I am Richard Saxe, and you are 'Our Lady of the Beeches.'"

There was a short silence, while the water lapped the sand with soft lips, and the trees stirred overhead. He could barely see the outlines of her figure, it was so dark; he looked in vain for the moon; the mesh of waving darkness overhead was studded with stars.

"Hush!" she said suddenly. "He is crying, too."

"Le Mioche," suggested Saxe.

Then he smiled to himself. Leduc's tears were very near the surface.

"Where has he been, do you know?" she asked, rising and facing him. "He did not come, and he never wrote."

"Yes, he has been on a spree, — to Bangor."

"To Bangor!" She laughed softly.

"Yes, he told me of the spree, but I never suspected that you furnished the money for it — you and I."

They both laughed again.

All at once she turned. "What is burning? It is your supper!"

"It is my supper; my only trout. Let it burn."

But she sped up the path; he saw her slight figure bend easily over the fire, there was a splash of sparks, another laugh, and she stood upright, her face in the light, beckoning to him.

"It is a charcoal — ruined — a wreck. And those two old — geese — have disappeared. I hope they have n't gone altogether ! "

"I should n't mind," answered Saxe recklessly. "But they are only in the cabin."

"Oh, you have a cabin? How disappointing."

She turned, with a little gesture of disapproval that delighted him.

"The cabin is Leduc — Bonnet's. Behold my habitation."

"Ah, a tent. That is much better."

She sat down, leaning against the very tree on which he had leaned two hours before while reading her letter, and took off her hat. Her fair hair was ruffled into a roughness of little curls and tendrils ; her cheeks were flushed. Saxe stood looking at her.

From the cabin window came a narrow strip of yellow light and the sound of voices.

"If you don't put on some wood, the fire will be out in two minutes."

He started. "Yes, — I will put on a log."

While he bent over the fire an idea struck him. "You will have a cup of coffee? It is good."

"Yes. I am hungry."

She smiled on him with the serenity common in some women when a man is on their account beside himself with embarrassment — or any other emotion. He poured out the coffee, gave her sugar and condensed milk; he rushed to the cabin and brought out a tin of "water crackers" and another of deviled ham. A small box — it had held can-

dles — did duty as her table. He watched her eat.

"Don't you want to know how we happened to drop in on you in this way?" she asked, after a time.

"Yes, I want to know," he answered with an effort. "Your letter came this afternoon. It was written in England."

She dropped her cracker, and looked away. "My letter," she repeated — "which letter? I never" — A slow flush, deliciously visible in the now vivid firelight, was creeping from her high white collar to the loose hair on her brow.

Saxe's courage came back with a rush. "Yes, your letter. The best of them all. The one about the fool who dared to make love to you. To you! You ended by bidding God bless me."

She set down her cup, and rose.

"Mr. Saxe, — or do you mean Dr. Saxe? — that was all very well, it was amusing, and harmless, so long as we did n't know each other, but now that we do — in a way — you must forget all that. Although," she went on, in a lighter tone and with a little smile, "I am off to-morrow, so after all it does n't make much difference."

Saxe winced.

"I must forget all that. And you are off to-morrow?"

"Yes, I go back to civilization, leaving Annette." As she spoke, the old woman and the old man came out of the cabin, and approached the fire.

"Monsieur must excuse me," Leduc began at once, in French, wiping his eyes. "It is my wife. She comes all the way from Paris to look me up."

Saxe held out his hand to the old

woman. "I cannot tell you how glad I am that you found us," he said. "Sit down and have some supper."

"Thank you, sir," she answered, in far better English than her husband could boast. "We drove over from Windsor."

"Mademoiselle will permit the old man to kiss her hand, after all these years?" Leduc bowed in a graceful way that amused Saxe in the midst of his bewildered pain. Going away to-morrow!

"It is to visit the grave of our little child, sir, that I have come," Annette went on, in an undertone, to Saxe. "And Mademoiselle has come with me because I am too old to go so far alone. She is an angel."

"I am sure of it."

"What will you? Only my man

knows to find the grave, and we may be gone two-three days, and who but Mademoiselle would stay all that time in the 'otel at Windsor!"

Saxe took off his eyeglasses and closed his eyes hard for a minute.

"She is going to stay at Windsor?"

"Annette, some one must tell the boy that we are coming, or he will drive off and leave us."

It was the voice of Mademoiselle.

Annette turned down the slope, and Saxe, calling after her to wait, thrust a lighted lantern into Leduc's hand and sent him after her.

Then he turned. "You say you are off to-morrow," he said quickly; "but Annette tells me that you were going to stay on at Windsor while she and — he — go to see the grave of Le Mioche. Now listen. You say I must forget all

that, now that we know each other. Very well ; I promise ; I will neither by word nor look, if I can help it, remind you of anything. You will have to see me only when you choose. I will do all that you wish. I have always done all that you wish. Only stay. Let them go to the grave of Le Mioche."

The old pair were coming back, the lantern danced among the trees, and Leduc's voice, piercingly sweet, sang a snatch of some old song: "Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un instant."

She laughed. "Not very polite of him, after her coming all this way, is it?"

"You will stay?" he persisted, frowning over his eyeglasses.

"If I had known I was to see you" — she answered, demurring.

"But you did not. Nor I. And it is not fair to punish me for what — the gods have chosen to bring about."

"Mademoiselle, a storm is coming up, and the boy refuses to wait," Annette said, coming toward them.

The trees were tossing, the wind moaning.

"Yes, you must go," assented Saxe, a little roughly.

She put on her hat without speaking, and they followed the lantern to the waiting wagon.

"Well?" he said suddenly, stopping.

"I — I would rather go."

"No. Stay. You forget the chief thing," he added, forcing a laugh. "I do not, need not, know your name, Mademoiselle! Can't you stay?"

"'Mademoiselle,'" she repeated,

hesitating. Then, holding out her hand, "Very well. I will stay; you will not know my name, and — you will forget the rest. We will begin over!"

Saxe awoke at dawn, a sound of beating mingling with the every-day one of Leduc's voice raised in his favorite "Le vie est vaine." Vague reminiscences of house-cleaning, years ago in his grandmother's day, stirred his brain; he opened his eyes to find his tent flooded with rosy light; to see, beyond, a patch of blue sky, blurred and broken by stiff pine branches. He remembered, and reaching for his eyeglasses, put them on.

"I say, Leduc, — Bonnet, — whatever your name is!"

"M'sieu?"

Leduc's face, rosy as the dawn itself in spite of his age, appeared in the open flap, his soft curly hair ruffled.

"What the deuce is that noise?"

The old man entered unceremoniously, a stout stick in his hand.

"It is that I am preparing for Annette, M'sieu. She has eyes like a hawk, and a tongue like a scourge."

"So it *was* house-cleaning!"

"C'est ça. I've been beating my mattress. The dust in that mattress was something étonnant! and not a grain would have escaped her. A terrible woman!"

Saxe turned over lazily. "Then you think she will be coming again to-day?"

Leduc rose and took up his stick. "Coming? M'sieu — she love Leduc, that old woman. It is a cur'ous thing, by gum! Twenty years ago she left

Leduc. He treated her pretty bad, an' she could n't stand it, so off she went at the end. Now — here she is."

"You know perfectly well that she has n't come on your account, you old scoundrel," returned Saxe, watching him.

"Comment ça? Why, then? Why she come?"

"Le Mioche."

Leduc turned and looked out into the morning.

"Tiens, Le Mioche!"

"Yes, Le Mioche. Now look here, Leduc. Did I, or did I not, pay you well, last year?"

"Oui, monsieur" —

"Did I, or did I not, give you a new rifle, and a present in money besides?"

"M'sieu was very good — M'sieu is galant homme."

The old man turned, his face irradiated with the most enchanting of smiles.

Saxe went on, rubbing his eyeglasses on a corner of his blanket. "Very well. If you want another present this time, — say that setter of Sam Bradley's and some money, — you, too, are going to behave like a — galant homme!"

"M'sieu, Leduc *is* a galant homme. Leduc a bad man, but he always been a slave to women."

"Nonsense! I don't want you to be a slave, but I won't have you disappoint — Annette."

"M'sieu a raison. Poor Annette, she would be very sad. Also Mademoiselle."

"Also Mademoiselle," agreed Saxe, without flinching from the keen eyes fixed on him.

"What does M'sieu wish me to do?" asked the old man, unable, as he always was, to look long into Saxe's face, and turning away.

"I want you to be as decent as your instincts, partly inherited, no doubt, also partly acquired, will allow you." Then with a mischievous delight he went on slowly: "Those fools who deny atavism, inherited tendency, the whole Darwinian theory, should be confronted in a body, my good Leduc, with you. You are a most beautiful example of all of those things. The shape of your head is distinctly simian; your instincts are simian, — splendidly so. You have spent the greater part of your life in the humanizing influence of great trees, and yet you are untouched by any of their qualities. Amazing, amazing!"

There was a short pause, after which the old man, passing his hand through his hair as if to feel the shape of his head, said: —

"M'sieu wishes to bathe, this morning? What time does M'sieu want his coffee?"

Saxe looked at his watch. "Be ready for me at half past six — and remember: one word to disappoint your poor wife, — no dog, no present."

Leduc straightened up. "It is not necessary for M'sieu to menacer. Leduc have a heart, and Leduc grows old."

Then he went out with a beautiful dignity of carriage.

Saxe splashed about in the still gilded waters of the little lake for ten minutes, dressed, and appeared at the fire promptly at half past six. Breakfast

was ready. Coffee, fried eggs, bacon, and johnny-cake. Leduc, in a clean flannel shirt, his hair still separated into gleaming, wavy locks by the recent passage of a wet comb, awaited him.

When Saxe had demonstrated his good humor by praise of the johnny-cake, the old man began gravely: —

"M'sieu — Leduc wants to tell M'sieu something."

"To tell me something?"

"Oui, M'sieu — Leduc has no children; he is a poor solitary old man — except when M'sieu is with him."

Saxe bowed his acknowledgment of this compliment in silence.

"But Leduc, — Leduc has here in his breast — what no one can take from him. A memory."

The sharp blue eyes were wet. Saxe

put down his cup and watched him, a frown of interest between his brows.

"Years ago — Leduc had a little child. A little child with so yellow curls. God sent it to Leduc to make him a better man. But God got tired of trying and took Le Mioche."

"For Heaven's sake, man, stop it!"

Saxe rose impatiently and turned away. A squirrel rushed across an opening in the trees, his plumy tail erect; birds were singing everywhere; a little yellow flower peered out from the mossy roots of the one beech near. Saxe stooped and picked the flower with gentle fingers, and after looking at it closely, laid it between the leaves of his notebook.

"M'sieu!"

He turned. Leduc's face was white, his eyes dry. "M'sieu, you wrong an

old man. Leduc a bad man, a liar, he beat his wife when he was drunk, he cheat at cards. But Leduc love Le Mioche. Le Mioche love him. M'sieu scold about Annette. Bien — I am sorry she comes, — ça m'ennuie, — but M'sieu go to the grave of Le Mioche and he will see how many white stones! Thirty-one. Every year one. Leduc did not forget Le Mioche, M'sieu."

He was telling the truth, and the poor dignity in his voice touched Saxe, who held out his hand.

"I beg your pardon, Leduc. I was wrong, and I am sorry."

Leduc shook his hand and sat down again in silence.

"Monsieur," he said at last, in one of his accesses of good French, "you are very wise, and I am an ignorant old scoundrel, but I have taught you

one thing that you did not know before. The worst of men has his one good quality. The blackest of sheep has its one white hair. It is bad to be too pessimistic."

Saxe repressed a smile at the old man's vain delight in himself as an exposition of this theory, and went on with his breakfast.

"M'sieu, Mademoiselle is pretty, is n't she?"

Saxe started. "Pretty, oh, yes. Very pretty, and very good — I gather from your wife."

"Yes, very good. I know her since she was a little baby. That 's why I still say 'Mademoiselle.' Her real name is" —

"My very good fellow, do you think I do not know her real name?"

Leduc started, as he scraped the re-

maining shreds of bacon together preparatory to mopping them up on a bit of bread. "M'sieu knew her before?"

"Of course I knew her before," returned the other man, taking off his glasses and opening his eyes very wide. "Why should n't I know her?"

"Dieu, que le monde est petit! But that is very nice for her, — to find M'sieu here, — and very nice for M'sieu — as the other lady does not come."

"The other lady?"

"The lady whose letter makes M'sieu's eyes change. Oh, Leduc is not blind! Last year there was a letter, too" —

Saxe considered a minute, and then, vaguely seeing a series of advantages to be derived from this error, laughed aloud.

"Leduc certainly is not blind. As

he says, I cannot have the lady of the letters, so it will be very agreeable for me to see something of Mademoiselle, who is charming, too."

"I suppose M'sieu will not be coming to the woods any more?"

The old man, encouraged in his curiosity, smiled knowingly. "He will be marrying this winter."

"Everything is possible in this best of possible worlds. Now, then, old chatterbox, hurry and clear away that mess!"

II

"Good-morning, Dr. Saxe!"

Saxe started up from the pine needles on which he had been lying flat on his back. She stood at a little distance, slim and cool-looking in a violet linen dress, with a sailor hat that cast a shadow on her face, leaving in the light only her beautiful mouth and rosy, cleft chin.

"I was afraid you were asleep, and it would have been a pity to waken you."

Not a trace of embarrassment about her. He remembered the hesitancy in his voice the night before, and wondered.

"I was not asleep. I was merely dreaming" —

He touched her proffered hand lightly, and joined her as she took the way to the camp.

"Dreaming?" She was n't even afraid to ask him that, it appeared.

"Yes. Dreaming about a half-invented anæsthetic that occupies my thoughts most of the time, even here in the woods."

"If I were a man, I should be a doctor," she answered, picking up a pine cone and sniffing at it.

"I have not practiced for years, however."

"No? What a strange thing! I should think — However, no doubt you do more real good in your laboratory."

Saxe turned and looked at her. "How do you know I have a laboratory?" he asked.

"Every one has heard of Richard Saxe and his discoveries." Her momentary hesitation was hardly noticeable, and she went on with the leisurely calm of the clever woman of the world. "I read the other day that your new book is the success of the year. That must be very gratifying?"

"It is gratifying. You have not read it?"

She turned her clear brown eyes full on him, as devoid of expression as two pools of woodland water.

"No, I fear I should understand very little of it. Ah, here we are. I wonder whether you could give me a glass of water?"

Saxe took a dipper and a cup and went to the spring. So that was how it was to be. Very good. If she could keep it up, — and she evidently could, —

he would be able to, also. It would be very amusing. He dipped up the cool water and filled the cup. It annoyed him to remember his agitation of the night before. It always annoys a man to find a woman unembarrassed in a situation that he himself is unable to carry off with ease. So be it. Not a word or a hint to recall any former acquaintance. He frowned savagely as he went back to the mossy path. It had been more than an acquaintance, it had been a friendship, but as she chose to ignore it, it should be ignored.

She drank the water with a delightful childlike graciousness, holding out the cup to be refilled.

"I have n't seen a tin dipper since I was a small child," she said, watching it flash in the sun as he shook it free of the last drops of water.

"You are an American, are you not?"

"Yes. But I have lived in Europe for many years. As a matter of fact, this is my first visit home since I married!"

She said it as she would have to an utter stranger. Then, with a change of tone: "What a perfectly beautiful place you have chosen for your camp! Have you been here long?"

"Just a week. I was at Bar Harbor, but it grew too gay to suit me, so I wired Leduc, with whom I have camped before, and came on at a day's notice. He is a charming old scamp, and will amuse you."

"He was always a scamp, and always charming. I remember as a wee child having a decided and unabashed preference for him, somewhat to Annette's disgust."

Annette appeared in the doorway of the cabin as she spoke, a pair of brown velveteen trousers over her arm.

"Lucien!" she called.

"Leduc is skulking behind the bushes there by the lake," said Saxe in an undertone, "but he might as well give up; his day of reckoning has come."

"Lucien! Mademoiselle, have you seen him?"

The young woman turned. "Yes, I have seen him, but I am not going to betray him."

"Betray him! His clothes are in a state, — and the key of his chest is not in the pocket as he said. I can at least darn his socks if I can get at them."

She called again, and then went reluctantly back into the cabin.

"I confess to an unregenerate feel-

ing of sympathy for Leduc," remarked Saxe, looking toward the place where the old man had disappeared.

"So do I! Oh, so do I! If he does n't want his socks darned, why darn them? By the way, Dr. Saxe, are you going to ask us to stay to breakfast, — I mean dinner?"

"It had not occurred to me to ask, 'Mademoiselle,' — I had taken it for granted. Leduc has a fine menu arranged, — fried fish as chief attraction, I believe, only — By Jove, I was to catch the fish!" He looked at his watch. "After eleven. Dinner is at twelve. Would you care to go with me? The boat is perfectly dry, and it will not be very warm."

She rose. "Of course I care to go, and I shall also fish."

"I doubt it. I bait with worms."

"Do you? Then I, too, bait with worms."

He laughed. "I don't believe you ever baited a hook in your life. Now did you? — 'cross your heart?'"

"No. But to-day I bait — with worms."

They walked to the lake, and found Leduc busily digging, a tin box beside him on a fallen log.

"Worms?"

"Oui, M'sieu."

"What 's in the bundle?" asked Saxe curiously, poking with his foot an uncouth newspaper package that lay near the log.

The old man looked up, his face quivering with laughter.

"M'sieu will not betray me? Nor Mademoiselle?"

"No," she answered for them both.

Leduc unrolled the paper and displayed a collection of brown and gray knitted socks, heelless and toeless for the most part, as well as faded and shabby.

"I 've had holes in my socks for twenty years and more," he explained in French; "I 'm used to 'em, I like 'em, and I mean to have 'em. She 's a good woman, Annette, and I 'm very fond of her, but she is as obstinate as a mule, and"— He broke off, finishing his sentence by rolling the bundle together again, and driving it with a kick firmly into the end of a hollow log.

Still laughing, Saxe and his companion got into the boat and pushed off.

"She is the gentlest and tenderest of women as a rule; this is an entirely new phase to me."

"The effect of Leduc's 'shadow' on

her," commented Saxe absently, rowing out into the brilliant water.

She looked at him sharply, and then set to work disentangling her fishing line. She had long white hands with rather square-tipped fingers, and supple wrists. He noticed that she wore only one ring, a ruby, besides her wedding-ring. She baited her hook without flinching, or any offer of help from him, and silence fell as the fish began to bite. Saxe, absent-minded, lost several big fellows, but she landed one after the other with childish delight, expressed only by a heightened color and a trembling of pleasure on her lips.

At length Leduc came down to the shore and hailed them. "Time to come back if you want to eat them fish to-day," he called. "Especially if all their heads has to be cut off first."

"What does he mean?" she asked, as Saxe obediently pulled up the big stone that served as anchor.

"He is laughing at me, the cheeky old beggar. I cleaned one for my supper last night" —

"The one that burnt?"

"The one that burnt. And I cut off its head, — a great mistake, it seems. How many are there?"

She bent over, poking the gasping things with one finger. "Two — three — five — seven!"

The scent of the pines was strong in the noon sun as they landed; the darkness of the thick boughs pleasant and cool. Leduc put the fish in a net, and went up to the cabin by a short cut.

Saxe took off his hat. "It is very warm; are you tired?"

"Not a bit. I live a good deal in the

country, and often am hours tramping about in much rougher places than this."

"Ah! Then you will rather enjoy a few days spent in this way."

"Yes. But Annette and Lucien will be off to-morrow, and I shall bore myself to death on the veranda of the Windsor House."

"That must be rather bad. Are your fellow victims quite impossible, or can you amuse yourself with any of them?"

"There are only two. One an old lady from Dover, who is perfectly deaf, the other a young man of the shop-keeping class, — very ill, poor boy. He told me, with pride, that one of his lungs was entirely gone."

"Then let us hope that the grave of Le Mioche is not too far. Leduc is such a slow-moving creature that but for fear

of being in the way, I should go with them to urge him on, that your martyrdom may not be too long."

She looked at him, a smile twitching the corners of her mouth. "What *have* I done?"

"What have you done?" He stared back relentlessly.

"I am not a bit afraid of you, you know! Come, don't be cross any more."

With a sudden access of perfectly frank coquetry, she held out her hand to him. "Are you nice again? Remember you have sworn allegiance to" —

He smiled as he took her hand, but his eyes were grave.

"To Our Lady of the Beeches."

III

Leduc, pressed by his wife for information as to the whereabouts of the little grave, was vague. It was off to the northwest, he said. The trees he had planted around it were big now.

Then, urged to greater explicitness, he subsided into a ruminating silence, which Annette apparently knew of old, for she made no effort to break it, but sat with folded hands watching the afternoon sun on the trees. She was a handsome old woman, with a fine aquiline profile and a velvety brown mole on one cheek. Saxe liked her face, and decided, looking at it with the thoughtful eye of the student, that after all she had done well in leaving her husband,

so much her inferior, and developing her character in her own way.

The two women had stayed on at the camp all day with a matter-of-factness that Saxe knew must have originated in the younger of them. She chose to stay, and chose to stay in her own way, without discussion, without fuss. It was she who had, without any mention of the missing socks, persuaded Annette that her husband's habits, fixed for over twenty years, need not be disturbed, and the old woman had followed her back to the fire without protest.

They sat for two hours, Saxe and the women, talking little, drowsy with the aroma of the woods, and full each of his or her own thoughts. Saxe would not have offered to move till night. All initiation, he had determined, perhaps with a touch of malice, should come

from her. His malice, however, failed, for toward sundown she turned to him, and in the sweetest voice in the world, asked whether there was no place near from which they might see the sunset.

"Yes, if you are good for a rather rough tramp of a quarter of an hour."

"I am. Will you take me?"

He rose. "With pleasure."

She gave a few directions to the old woman, then joined him, and they went in silence through the trees. After a few minutes the ground, slippery with dead leaves and rough with hidden stones, rose abruptly. She looked down suddenly, and up, and then, still without speaking, into Saxe's face, which remained perfectly stolid. The trees were beeches.

"Beeches are my favorite trees," she

said calmly, pausing and breaking off a tuft of the fresh green leaves.

"Are they? We are just on the edge of a rather large tract of them. Be careful, the ruts are very deep. There used to be a logging-camp about a mile ahead of us, and this is the old road to it."

"I shall not stumble."

The silence, half resentful, senseless as he felt such resentment to be, on his side, was apparently that of great interest on hers. She moved deliberately, with the grace of considerable, well-distributed strength, pausing now and then to look at some particular tree, once to pick a long fern which she carried like a wand. When they had reached the height and come out on the narrow ledge, below which a clearing, stretching to the horizon, gave them a

full view of the sinking sun, she uttered a little cry of pleasure, and then, sitting down on a stump, was again still.

Just below the ledge ran a thread of a brook in a wide rocky bed ; beyond it a broad strip of silver-beeches swayed in the light, dying wind, and then came the plain, the stumps of the trees already half covered with a growth of rough grass, young trees, and bracken. Saxe was fond of the place, and, though sunsets made him vaguely unhappy, had often walked up there at that hour.

He leaned against a tree and watched the scene. It was very beautiful, now that the sky was a glare of crimson and gold, but he had seen it before, and for the first time he could study in safety the face of the woman. Her profile, outlined against a wall of rough rock,

was clear-cut and strong; her head, bare in the light, a glow of warm gold divided by a narrow parting from the forehead to the knot at the crown. It was a well-shaped head, and well placed on the broad, sloping shoulders. Her mouth, red and curved, was a little set, the deep-dented corners giving it a look of weary determination. In spite of the radiance of her hair, she looked her full age.

Suddenly she turned and caught his eyes fixed on her.

"A penny" — she said carelessly.

He swooped down on his glasses and took them off. "I was wondering — you must n't be offended — whether or no your hair was dyed."

"And what did you decide?"

"I had n't decided at all. You interrupted me."

She laughed the little laugh that made her both younger and older: "I am so sorry. Pray — go on considering." And she turned again to the sky.

Her perfect unconcern made him feel like a snubbed schoolboy, but his face only hardened a little as he sat down on the grass near by, and directed his eyes to the banks of purpling clouds that hung, gold-edged, over the horizon.

At last it was over; the light died away; the moon, nearly full, became visible; night had come.

"I think we 'd better go down," Saxe observed, rising, and putting on his hat. "It will be dark under the trees, and supper will be ready. I hope you 're hungry?"

"I am ravenous. And — thanks, so much, for bringing me up here. It has

been the delightful finish to a delightful day." There was a little tone of finality in her voice that hurt him.

"I hope it is n't the last time," he said politely, as they reached the rough road and began the descent.

"I fear it must be, Dr. Saxe. Leduc — I mean Lucien — will surely take her to-morrow, and I can hardly roam about in the woods after nightfall with you, without even their nominal chaperonage, can I?" She smiled at him, as if amused by the absurdity of her own question.

"I suppose not," he returned. "It is a pity, though, for the sunsets are always good, and you seem really to care for such things."

"Yes. I really care for such things."

They neither of them spoke again until they reached the camp, fragrant

with the odors of coffee and frying ham.

To Saxe the day had been one of disappointments, he did not quite know why nor how.

It was not that she had kept him at a distance, for he had expected that, and had several times taken a sort of pleasure in doing as much to her. It was not that he was disappointed in her herself; she was beautiful, well-bred, all that he had known she must be. And yet he was dissatisfied and a little sore. He remembered a phrase in one of her letters: "If your eyes happened to be blue instead of brown, or brown instead of gray, I should be disappointed. More — if you had a certain kind of mouth I should be quite unable to like you." He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly as he combed his hair in his tent. "That

must be it. She does not like me. She is 'unable to like me.'"

He went back to the fire resolved not to care. During supper he was very gay, almost brilliant, with the brilliance mental pain sometimes gives; he talked of many things, skillfully ignoring any subject that could spoil the mood to which he was grateful. Leduc, never shy, had his full share of the conversation, and also of the whiskey punch, which, as the evening was cool, Saxe insisted on making, and made very well. Old Annette, sad and absent, spoke little.

"The boy is coming with the wagon at nine," the young woman said at last, bending to the firelight to look at her watch. "It is a quarter before, now."

She rose and put on her hat.

"Thank you again," she said, holding

out her hand to Saxe, "for a most enchanting day. I shall never forget it."

"You are very kind. The pleasure was mine." Then turning to Leduc, he went on, "You will want a few days' leave, I understand, beginning with to-morrow? How far is the — place you are going to?"

The old man, taken by surprise, hesitated. "Non, non, not to-morrow, M'sieu. It is not so far."

"Then why not to-morrow? Mademoiselle and your wife cannot have much time to devote to you and your caprices. Allons!"

"It is not so far, — but also it is not so near. I — have a very bad knee. A knee to make pity, could you see it, Mademoiselle. Rheumatism, and — a fall I got this morning. I am a lame man."

"He lies, M'sieu," interrupted Annette, her lips shaking. "I know his face when he lies."

"So do I. I'll arrange it for you, Annette. Ah, there is the wagon."

He accompanied them to it, and saw them off without asking about their plans for the next day. Then he went back to Leduc, whom he found rummaging busily in a box for a bottle of arnica.

"Very foolish of M'sieu to take sides with *her*. She is a silly old woman. And then, when we go, M'sieu will be *all alone*," he observed, as Saxe approached.

"Shut up, Leduc. And either you go to-morrow, or you get no dog. Compris?"

Then he went into his tent and let down the flap.

IV

THE next morning Leduc, bringing an armful of wood to the camp, slipped, fell, and twisted his ankle. Saxe, missing him, and led by his groans, bent over him with a skeptical smile that disappeared as he saw the old man's face.

"It is a judgment on you," he could not resist saying, when he had half dragged, half carried, the much more helpless than necessary invalid into the cabin, and cut off his boot.

Leduc grinned in the midst of his pain. "Bien — how you will, M'sieu. Leduc badly hurt. Leduc lame man. Maintenant il ne s'agira plus des pélerinages."

Unable to guess the reason for the old

man's objections to conducting his wife to the child's grave, and unwilling to gratify him by questions, Saxe dressed the foot in silence, and then set off himself to the village to do certain errands and fetch the mail. Mrs. Lounsberry, the postmistress, with whom he was rather a favorite, questioned him, with the delighted curiosity of a lonely woman, about the mysterious guest at the hotel.

"Henry says he drives 'em every day over to your place, and fetches 'em again after sundown. Any relations?"

"Yes. The young lady is my cousin, the elder one the wife of — a friend of mine. Have I no newspapers?"

"Did n't I give 'em to you? Oh, here they are. Well, as the lady 's your cousin, I presume you know how to pronounce her name. It does beat all,

that name. More than *I* can make out. There 's a couple of letters for her, if you happen to be going that way."

"I 'll take them," he returned, with a sudden resolve, "but there 's no use my telling you how to pronounce her name, —I can hardly manage it myself. Good-morning."

He put the letters in his pocket and went down the straggling village street to the "hotel," a large white house, girdled by a slanting veranda.

"If she is in sight, I shall go up. If not, I 'll send for Annette. I 'll have to tell her about Leduc, anyway," he decided.

When he turned the corner of the building he saw a small group of rocking-chairs in a shady corner of the veranda, and over the back of one of them a mass of gold-brown hair that he knew.

The other chairs were occupied by Annette and a fiddle-headed young man drinking a glass of milk. Annette saw him first, and rose, with a resumption of manner that she had not found it necessary to use toward the milk-drinking youth.

"Bonjour, M'sieu."

"Bonjour, Annette. — Good-morning."

The younger woman looked up from her embroidery and held out her hand. "Good-morning. How kind of you to come."

"I have letters for you." He handed them to her without a word of explanation or assurance, and she took them as unconcernedly. "Thanks."

She wore a pink gown of a kind that convinced him of her intention of staying at home that day, and rocked her

chair slowly with deliberate pattings of a foot in a high-heeled shoe adorned with a large square buckle. Saxe sat down in the chair vacated by the youth, and took off his hat.

"I have bad news for you," he began presently, as she finished reading her letters. "Leduc has hurt his foot and — and cannot possibly go — anywhere — for three or four days."

Annette clasped her hands. "Mon Dieu, mon Dieu! Is it true, M'sieu, or is it only one of his tricks?"

"It is true, Annette."

"Annette, fetch the book that 's lying on my table, — and put these letters in my writing-case."

The old woman obeyed, leaving them alone.

"Has Leduc really hurt his foot, Dr. Saxe?"

There was no trace of insolence in her tone, but he understood, and the question brought the blood to his face.

"Did you not hear me tell Annette that he has?" he answered, his brows knitting.

"Yes, I heard you."

"Then why — tell me why should I take the trouble to lie about such a trifle?"

She bit her lip. "I thought you might possibly let him keep up the pretense of being unable to go" —

"That I might have the pleasure of detaining you here for a few days longer? Believe me, dear lady, I have no fancy for unwilling companionship, even yours."

He had gone farther than he had intended, and stopped, a trifle ashamed of his vehemence. Another second,

and he would probably have lost his point by apologizing, when she said, with such unexpected gentleness that he almost gasped: "But you are so wrong! My companionship, such as it is, is anything but unwilling, Dr. Saxe. I enjoyed yesterday so much, and had hoped" —

"You had hoped" — he repeated.

"That you would let us come over to the camp this afternoon again, — in case Leduc was obstinate and refused to go."

Saxe walked to the edge of the veranda and stood looking down at a bed of sprawling nasturtiums at his feet. When he turned, his eyeglasses were in his hand.

"I don't understand you," he said bluntly, "and I might as well own that I don't. Tell me what it is you want,

and Heaven knows I'll give it to you if I can."

"Very well. I will be perfectly frank: I like you, I like the camp, and I wish you'd be nice, and just 'begin over,' as you promised the night before last."

"You ask a good deal."

"I know it. But it's the only way. Don't you see, we are strangers, yet we know each other embarrassingly well; I have told you things that no one else knows, — shown you a side no one else ever saw" — She said it bravely, her face full to the noon sun.

"And now you regret it?" he asked gently.

She paused. "No, I do not regret it, only *you* are not my Pessimist, and I am not your — your Lady of the Beeches."

"But that is just what you are — my Lady of the Beeches. You are that, and neither you nor I can help it! You told me in those letters not a word that you should not have told, there was not a word of harm in them, and I can't see why you won't have me, Richard Saxe, for the friend you yourself declared the Pessimist to be to you. If you would let me, I would be to you the best friend a woman ever had."

She shook her head. "No, no."

"You mean that you don't believe in such friendships? Good! no more do I. But — I love you. You know that. You knew it long ago, yet you let me keep on being your friend. Is not that so?"

She acknowledged the truth of his statement with a slow nod, and he went on.

"That can't hurt you. You know who I am; you know all about me. Surely you can trust me never to make love to you?"

"Yes."

"And — even if I were a fool and a cad, and a man would have to be both to dare to make love to you — you must know that you are perfectly capable of — keeping me in order."

She smiled meditatively. "Yes, I think I could."

"Well, then, don't you see, — what is the use of trying to pretend that the last year has not existed, — that we do not know each other? What I propose is unconventional, but you surely are not afraid of that — at least up here in the wilderness. Give me your hand and let us be friends until you go away, or until you choose to send me away.

'Et puis, bonsoir!' I do not know your name; you know I will never learn it against your will. Trust me."

"My name is Winifred Zerdahélyi," she answered, giving him her hand, "and I do trust you."

"Thanks."

He dropped her hand as some one came up the board walk toward them. It was Henry Cobb, the boy who drove the two women to and from the camp. He had come for orders.

"We are going in half an hour, Henry," Winifred said, "if you can be ready."

Then she turned in a matter-of-fact way to Saxe. "I must go and put on another gown. Will you wait and drive over with us?"

V

He noticed when she and old Annette came down a few minutes later that she carried a little green bag with satin strings. It was very warm, and the first part of the drive being through bare fields, she wore a big hat with a wreath of hop-flowers on it, a charming hat that he liked. He sat in front with Cobb, but arranged himself sideways that he might both see and hear her. She was in a merry mood, rattling on carelessly about the scenery, the hotel, and a thousand different things, rather to help him, he realized. For he himself found talking an effort; even thinking bothered him, and his mind hovered

aimlessly between the hop-flowers on her hat and the green bag.

For a man of his age and character, the declaration he had made was a very momentous one, and curiously enough it seemed the more momentous in that it must of itself prove absolutely without results of any kind. He knew that she did not care for him, and was glad of it; but the fact of his having blurted out in that bold way that he loved her had momentarily dazed him. The memory of his one other declaration of the kind came back to him as they jogged over the rough road: the moonlight, the long gravel walk leading up between fragrant rosebushes to the white house, the garden gate on which she had leaned while he talked. Of course he had not been a saint, and like other men he had had his experiences with

women, but he had loved but twice in his life, and he knew it.

He also felt, his eyes resting on her hands as they held the green bag, that he was not so old as he had fancied himself to be.

"We had a college professor up here once," Cobb was saying, "but we never had no countesses before."

"Countesses are very common in Europe, though," she answered, laughing, "thousands of us."

They had reached the edge of the wood, and leaving the road, drove across a broad tract of hummocky land, the hummocks treacherously hidden by a thick low growth of blueberries and scrub oaks.

"There's a bad bit of broken road down yonder that we avoid, comin' 'raound this way," explained Cobb,

urging his horse to a rather reckless gait.

Saxe wondered vaguely whether they would upset.

They reached the camp to find Leduc busy with the fire.

"M'sieu can live on letters, perhaps, but Leduc not. Mon Dieu, ces dames!"

He swept off his hat with an ironical smile at his wife. "Desolated to be unable to rise, but my foot is very bad — very bad, as M'sieu will tell you."

Saxe laughed with sudden gayety. "Not very bad, old sinner. Just bad enough, that is all."

There was nothing to eat, and they were hungry. Annette, touched by the look of pain in her husband's face, helped him to a tree, arranged him comfortably, and with a peremptory gesture forbade his moving. Then she

set to work to prepare the dinner. Luckily, Saxe had brought meat and a fresh loaf of bread from the village, so by two o'clock they were eating a very appetizing little meal.

"M'sieu objected very much last year to being so near the village," Leduc, most graceful of invalids, explained in French, as he drank his third cup of coffee; "but Leduc has lived in the woods long enough to know the advantages of civilization and butcher's meat. Leduc's teeth, too, are old for dog-biscuits, such as the young swells from New York eat when out hunting."

"Why do you speak of yourself in the third person? And why do you call yourself Leduc?"

The Countess fixed her direct gaze on him as she asked her questions.

He laughed. "I lived for years with

French half-breeds up in the north, — they always use the third person. As to Leduc, — they called me 'le duc' because I had a manner. You will admit, Mademoiselle, that the name is prettier than Bonnet, va!"

Saxe tried to reason away his own senseless happiness that expressed itself in what he felt to be a boundless grin. "It will be over in a few days; she will be gone; she will never think of me again," he told himself. But it was in vain. She was there; she knew that he loved her, and she still was there; he could hear her voice, see the sun on her hair; she met his eyes fearlessly, if also indifferently, and life was one great heart-throb of joy.

After dinner he helped Annette carry the dishes into the cabin, and coming back found Leduc stretched out on his

face, sound asleep, the Countess, the bag open beside her, working placidly on the big square of embroidery he had seen that morning at the hotel. Saxe's head swam. She looked so comfortable, so much at home. She pointed smilingly at the old man as Saxe sat down. "No one ever so enjoyed the advantages of a sprained foot before. Just look at him!"

"Ill-mannered old wretch! What are you making?"

He stretched out his hand, and taking the linen by one corner spread it over his knees.

"It is a tea-cloth, of course. Do you like it?"

The design was a conventional one, done in different shades of yellow. Saxe could not honestly say he admired it, and she laughed at his hesitation.

"Would n't — well — flowers be prettier?" he ventured.

"What kind of flowers?"

"M — m — m. *I* always liked wild roses — pink ones."

She paused while she re-threaded her needle, and then answered gayly, "Would you like a tea-cloth with pink wild roses all over it?"

"Would I like one!"

"I will make you one. Only I am sure that you never drink tea, now do you?"

"No, hang it, I don't! I never drink anything but an occasional whiskey and soda." He passed his brown, slim hand gently over the silks, and drew back.

"We 'll call it a 'whiskey and soda cloth,' then," she returned.

"Tell me," he began, after a long

pause, during which she worked busily, "did you ever get even with that — that beast in London?"

She flushed. "Yes. That is — I told my husband, and he convinced him of his — mistake."

"How, with a bullet?"

"Oh, dear, no! It was n't worth that, was it? I don't quite know what Bela said to him, but it answered the purpose."

"'Bela.' It is a pretty name. Tell me about him."

"What shall I tell you? He is thirty-four, tall, handsome,— what men call a good sort."

Saxe lay down and tilted his hat over his eyes.

"You don't mind my asking about him? It interests me."

"No, I don't mind."

"He must be very proud of you."

She laughed quietly. "Proud? I don't know. He is very fond of me."

"That of course. I meant proud."

But she shook her head. "No, poor fellow, I think he is somewhat ashamed of me, at times. You see, Hungarian women are very brilliant, — very amusing, — and I am rather dull."

"Dull!" Saxe sat up, and took off his eyeglasses. "You!"

"Yes, I. You remember I wrote you of my unfortunate passion for trees, and that kind of thing. Things that other women like bore me to death, and when I am bored I am" —

"Horrid!"

They both laughed. "Then," she went on, laying down her work and leaning against the tree, "I don't know anything about horses, and every one

else there is mad about them. Bela runs all over Europe, and I won't go with him. It is not nice of me, but it does bore me so!"

"Tell me more," said Saxe greedily.

"But it is n't interesting! And I don't know what you want to know."

"I want to know all you will tell me," he answered, his voice falling suddenly.

She took up her work and went on without looking at him. "Last year we went to Russia for some bear-hunting. I stayed in St. Petersburg with his uncle, who is Austrian Minister" —

"That was when you supped with an Emperor!"

"Yes. I did n't mean that I sat at his right hand, you know!"

"I know. Tell me, — where *is* the beech forest?"

"It is in Hungary, about two hours from Budapest. Bela hates the place; it is lonely, so I usually go there alone."

"That is one reason why" — he began, and stopped short.

She looked up inquiringly; then her eyes changed, and she went on. "One reason why I love it so. Yes. You are right. I do love to be alone sometimes."

"If you are awake, Leduc, why don't you say so?" cried Saxe suddenly, with a fierce frown.

Leduc rolled over, blinking helplessly.

"Oui, oui, M'sieu, — what time is it? Leduc — Sacristi, mon pied!"

In spite of his anger, Saxe could not refuse to re-dress the swollen ankle, and to his surprise the Countess put away her work, and helped him with

something more than mere handiness. He realized, however, with a grim amusement at his own folly, that the bandage would have been better had he done it alone.

VI

"You will laugh at me, — think me an old fool, — but I am going to tell you anyway," Saxe began, as they left the camp and made their way up the hill toward Sunset Ledge.

She looked at him in silent inquiry, in a way he liked, for her eyes met his with perfect confidence, and he could see the light in their clear depths.

"This tree here," he went on, pausing and laying his hand on a patch of moss on the trunk, "is the Dream Tree."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Yonder, in the little clearing, you can see the Butterfly Tree. The Wisdom Tree, alas, I have not yet

found, — and, candidly, I cannot say I am in a fair way of finding it."

She laughed. "I fear you are not. But — do you really love them? You used to laugh at me and call me a dreamer. How you did snub me at first!"

"I was a brute. I *do* really love them, though, and they, through you, have taught me much. Last year, as I wrote you, I was restless and unhappy here; the solitude got on my nerves; I could n't sleep. This year the beauty of it all came home to me; the quiet quieted me; I lived on from day to day in a sort of dream, — and then you came."

"We interrupted! A charming interruption, of course, but still we *are* one. How small the world is, that we should have come *here!*"

"How good the gods are!"

She stood still, leaning against a tree to rest. "Are they? Are you sure? I mean, we have met, and it has been a pleasure to us both, but we have also lost much." Her face was serious, she spoke slowly.

"What have we lost?"

"I can't just explain, but I feel it. I shall miss the Pessimist!"

"But why not keep him?"

She looked at him absently. "Oh, no. That is over and gone. We never could find each other again, — as we were. Surely you understand that as well as I."

"You mean because of what I told you this morning? But you knew it before I told you."

"Yes, I knew it; it is different now."

Saxe protested. "I don't see why! I 'm no boy to lose his head and make scenes. You can trust me, and you know it, or you would n't be here."

She shrugged her shoulders gently, and went on up the difficult way.

"But, when you go away, — you will surely let me write to you, and you will answer?" he insisted, as he followed.

"No."

"But why?"

"Because it is to be 'bonsoir,' as Leduc sings."

"That is not a sufficient reason." His voice was dogged, and she turned.

"But it is! I am the most obstinate woman in the world. I always do as I like."

"And what you 'like' is to throw me over when" —

She turned again, her eyes cold this

time. "There is no question of 'throwing over,' Dr. Saxe. I have given way to you in the matter of staying on here and taking up our — acquaintance where it ended in the letters, but I have not bound myself in any way to write you, or see you again. We will say no more about it, please."

Saxe was silent for a few minutes, then he said briskly, as she stopped again to draw breath: "You are right, Countess, and I beg your pardon. I have grown so used to the pleasure your letters have given me that I shall miss them tremendously at first, but of course I shall get used to it, and I am very grateful to you for giving me these few days."

"I shall miss the letters, too," she returned, with one of the sudden softenings that perplexed him. "I'm not

saying I shall be *glad* to — to lose you altogether."

"Thanks, you are kind."

They reached the ledge of rock, and sat down. It was early, and they discussed for some time the possibility of Leduc's being able to start off on the pilgrimage in three days, before the spectacle that they had come to see began.

"If the old ruffian would tell me how far the place is, I could judge better, but I can't get a word out of him," Saxe avowed. "He says 'it is n't so far, but then it is n't so near!'"

"It is not charitable of me, but I am inclined to believe that he has himself forgotten where it is!"

"No — no. You wrong him there. He does know." Saxe hesitated for a minute and then told her the story of the thirty-one white stones.

Her eyes filled with tears. "Poor old man! thirty-one years is a long time."

"Yes. Thirty-one years ago I was eleven years old, and you — did not exist! When you were born, I was already a big boy of thirteen. When is your birthday?"

"The 6th of December."

She sat with one arm around the silvery trunk of a young birch, her cheek pressed to it. Saxe realized that he would be sure to invent a fantastic name for that tree.

She asked him some questions about his new book, and he launched into an attempted explanation of it, she listening with earnest eyes and what he called, quoting himself with a smile, her "intelligent ignorance." The first shafts of the sunset found him deep in

metaphysics, and he broke off short when her upraised hand led his eyes to the sky.

As they went back to the camp, a squirrel darted down a tree and across their way, not two feet in front of them. The Countess gave a little cry of delight, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Look!"

But Saxe looked at her flushed face, and felt suddenly very old and tired. She was so young! He determined never to talk to her of "metaphysics and such stuff" again. He would show her things that made her look like that. He wondered whether there were no late-nesting birds, as there are late-bearing fruit trees. He knew she would love a bird's nest with eggs in it. And then, as the sight of the smoke rising among the

trees told them that they were within a stone's throw of the camp, she said suddenly, —

"But all that is materialistic, and you are an idealist!"

Saxe stood still. "I an idealist!"

"Yes. And you have strong principles, which you have no business to have, if you believe all that."

"Then a materialist has no principles?"

"According to Hobbes, no," she answered demurely.

He burst out laughing. "Oh, if you have read Hobbes, I give up. But after all you are wrong; Hobbes says 'a materialist can have no morals.' He does n't mention principles. And then, how many men's principles agree with their actions, Fair Lady? Not many. I mean men who have passed their lives

trying to think? Do you know anything of Spinoza's life?"

"No; only that he was a good man."

"He was a good man. We must go to supper, but first let me tell you that his opinions, his avowed principles, were such that he was excommunicated for blasphemy."

She nodded, going slowly down the path, her head bent. "I know, I remember."

"So, while God knows I am no idealist, admit that I may have principles and be a decent sort of fellow, and yet fully believe in my book!"

She smiled at him in the charming way some women have of smiling at a man they like, — as though she knew him much better than he knew himself, — and they went on without speaking.

VII

Leduc's foot was better the next morning, but still too painful to step on, and Saxe walked over to the hotel to tell the Countess, and bring her and Annette back for the day, as they had taken for granted was to be done. Halfway down the road, however, he met young Cobb, alone, and learned that the Countess had a bad headache and could not come. He gave the boy a quarter, and went back alone, his face set into an expression of immobility habitual to him in moments of strong feeling. It was a day wasted, and a day with her had come to mean to him a decade. A boy of twenty could not have been more bitterly disappointed, and more

savage in his disappointment. Leduc, however, saw nothing of this, and, when Saxe bandaged his foot again in the afternoon, and pronounced it decidedly better, the old man burst into a naïve expression of surprise.

"It is that to be an American! The sooner I am able to go, the sooner M'sieu loses Mademoiselle, and yet he urges me to go! He says my foot is better. A Frenchman would swear I have blood-poisoning."

"Not every Frenchman, mon vieux. There are a few decent ones among them, you to the contrary notwithstanding." Then he told Leduc that on the third day following he was to take his wife and go to the grave of Le Mioche. Leduc, serious as he always became at any mention of Le Mioche, protested feebly.

"But Annette has a right to go to it," insisted Saxe.

"She has no right. She left me."

"Because you ill-treated her."

"I struck her now and then when I 'd been drinking whiskey, — I was n't used to whiskey, — and I knew a pretty face when I saw it."

"Nonsense, Leduc. She was a good woman, and she could n't stand your — general slackness. You are to take her to the grave of Le Mioche on Monday; do you understand me?"

"It 's very far, M'sieu, and she is an old woman."

"Monday you are to take her, or — no dog, and no present."

Then savagely satisfied at having hastened a day he might well have put off, Saxe went for a long tramp, reaching home after sundown, tired and hungry.

Leduc, unable to sulk, was as gay as a lark, singing snatches of "La vie est vaine" to himself, and expressing his convictions that after all it would be best to take Annette to the grave Monday and have it over with. He could n't tell how long it would take. "Cela dépend de ses jambes," he said with a chuckle. It was n't so near, but then it was n't so far.

The forest was like fairyland that night in the moonlight. Saxe, tired as he was, could not sit still. Half an hour after supper he rose and started off restlessly through the wood. He had a good voice, uncultivated but sweet, and sang as he tramped through the lacy shadows of the beeches. It seemed as though she must be near, as though he caught glimpses of a light gown, here and there, among the mossy

trunks. "Ich gehe nicht schnell, ich eile nicht." He stumbled on a root and saved himself with difficulty from a fall.

"Ich gehe hin zu der schoensten Frau" —

And there she was, as if in answer to his thoughts, as happens to most people once in their lifetime. She stood quite still, holding under her chin the light scarf that hid her hair.

"'Our Lady of the Beeches!'"

Saxe took her hands, kissed them both, and then stood with them in his.

"You are here — alone?"

"Yes. It is not five minutes from the hotel."

"Then I have gone around the village, and come up beyond the high-road!"

"Yes."

"I love you."

"Hush!"

"You know I love you with all my heart?"

"Yes."

"You are not angry?"

"No."

"Look at me."

Gathering her hands into one of his, with the other he tilted back her chin, forcing her to look into his eyes. "I love you this way, — and you have not a scrap of feeling for me?"

"I like you very much," she answered quietly, not moving.

"You like me very much. Then, let me kiss you — once."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't wish to" —

Her eyes, unwavering, were fixed on

his; the lace scarf slipped back, but she did not move. Slowly he let her go, and stood looking at her, while she rearranged her scarf, and once more gathered it under her chin.

"You are a very daring woman," he said after a pause.

"Why?"

"Ah, why!" He shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "Come, it is getting late, let me take you back to the hotel. How is your headache?"

"Better, thank you, but you must n't take me back to the hotel; it would scandalize the good people there, and I know the way."

He took out his watch. "After all, it is early, — a little after nine. Sit down here and talk to me. You need n't be afraid; I shan't make an ass of myself again."

She sat down on a log. "I am not afraid."

"I know you're not, and — I wonder why?"

"There are two reasons. One is that you are a gentleman — in the real sense of the word; the other that — that" —

"That you are in no danger of losing your head." He laughed.

"Of course I am in no danger, but I did n't mean that. I mean that a woman can always control a man, — if she wishes to."

He laughed again. "Oh, how young you are, how young!"

"Am I so young?"

He looked at her, and saw her face worn and pale in the moonlight. "I am old," she went on slowly, her chin in her hand, "and you are young. I

am cold, and calculating, and slow, and you are impetuous and hot-headed" —

Saxe sighed. "That is what love does to a man. Not that I *did* lose my head, dear child. If I had! You were almost in my arms. I could have kissed you" —

"But you did n't."

"No, because I knew you did n't want me to. If you had wanted me to with your heart, however much you might have protested with your lips" —

She laughed outright. "Baby! As if you would have known."

Saxe watched her gravely. "Ah, yes, I should have known. And if you had — Well — after all, one has only one life to live, empty and dry enough at best, as a rule" —

"Tà, tà, tà, — the morals of a materialist! Now I am going. Good-night."

"And to-morrow?"

"To-morrow we are coming to dinner, if you will have us."

"Are you angry?"

She held out her hand with a little gracious shake of the head. "No. It was my own fault."

"Your own fault!" repeated Saxe, taking off his glasses in his bewilderment.

"Yes. Such things are always the fault of the woman."

"It was n't your fault, dear child, and your theory is wrong."

She hesitated, and then answered: —

"No, my theory is right. I am much younger than you, but I live in the world, and I know it. A man loses his head, possibly, quite against the woman's will, but — she should not have let him get to that point."

"And you mean that you will never let me get there" —

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

She sped away into the denser shadow, leaving him looking after her.

VIII

THE next morning, when the Countess arrived at the camp, Saxe met her, with a tin of worms in one hand, and two bamboo fishing-rods over his shoulder.

"You will have to earn your dinner to-day," he said, shaking hands with her. "Nothing but salt pork in camp, and Leduc insists on fried fish."

"Oh, how nice! It is cloudy, too; so much the better for 'bites,' is n't it?"

She hurried on to say good-morning to the invalid, who was paring potatoes with a languid air, and then, leaving Annette to prepare the meal, joined Saxe at the water's edge.

He had been prepared for frank good-comradeship, and had summoned up as

near its counterpart as in man lies, so the morning passed busily and gayly, without allusions or awkwardness. The sport was good, the light breeze agreeable, and they went back to camp, tired and hungry, with a big string of fish, to find Annette about to try her hand at that test of skill, an omelette.

While Leduc cleaned the fish, the Countess and Saxe made coffee, and an hour later, Leduc was once more asleep, Annette busy washing dishes in the cabin, and the other two practically alone.

They sat in silence, she building a little pyre of pine-cones, he idly watching her hands. Suddenly she looked up and their eyes met. A sudden trouble filled hers, and they darkened for the first time with embarrassment. He felt the blood sing in his ears.

"You are not angry?" he said, almost in a whisper.

She shook her head, with a warning glance at Leduc that nearly brought a cry of delight to Saxe's lips.

He rose. "Come," and she followed him without a word.

"That old wretch is playing possum," he said, with an unsteady laugh. "I will row you over to the water-lilies."

She took her seat in the boat, and then, as the sun fell on her, put up her hand to her head. "My hat!"

"Take mine." He handed her his, and she crushed it down on her forehead and smiled at him.

He rowed with quite unnecessary vigor, telling her of Leduc's consent to start Monday morning.

"You told me that before."

He laughed. "Did I? I'm sorry. Now, then"—

They had reached the patch of pond-lilies, and for a few minutes he worked in silence, pulling the languid white blossoms for her, and wiping their stems in his handkerchief.

As he got out of the boat he remarked, laughing, "Oh, what a good boy am I!"

"You are, indeed," she returned, taking the lilies he had held.

"You know what I mean?"

"Of course I do."

"And you think all the credit is due to you?" He smiled at her quizzically.

"Oh, no; not at all."

"Why not, if the blame was yours—last night?"

She shook her head. "It is n't fair to laugh at me. I only try to be 'square.'"

"And you are square, Winifred. No woman ever was more so. Only — there are circumstances when it is very easy to be square."

"That, of course, is true," she answered lightly. "Good heavens! what time is it? Annette is lighting the fire! We eat as much as people in a German novel, but even *we* can't be going to eat again already."

"No, it is only five. Now, how am I going to amuse your ladyship for the rest of the day?"

She considered. "I don't know. Read aloud to me."

"Nothing to read."

"Not even a Greek Testament, or a Horace?"

"Not even those general favorites."

"Have you literally not a book with you?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, yes. I have two of my own great works that I am supposed to be revising, and 'Uncle Remus,' and — Browning's 'Shorter Poems.'"

"Oh, 'Uncle Remus,' by all means. Read me the 'Tar Baby.'"

"Rather than 'Cristina,' — or 'The Last Ride Together'?"

"*Much* rather," she answered promptly, sitting down and demolishing her pyre of cones at a blow.

Saxe laughed. "Oh, you baby! You are afraid to face the music."

She looked up serenely. "*What* music?"

Saxe fetched the book, and read to her for over an hour. She was too tired to go to see the sunset, and busied herself helping Leduc make johnny-cake, greatly to his delight.

After supper young Cobb appeared,

to ask whether Leduc or Saxe would mind driving the two ladies home, as he was on his way to a party and would be unable to come until late. He was very splendid in a red cravat, his hair glistening and fragrant with pomade. The horse was hitched to a tree, and knew the way back, even if they did n't.

" What time will the party be over? " asked Saxe.

" 'Bout half past ten."

It was decided that young Cobb should come back by the camp and drive himself, Leduc being lame, and Saxe apparently afraid of horses.

" He ain't got no bad habits, except biting," the boy protested, half hurt.

" But I don't want to be bitten," Saxe explained gravely, and Cobb went his way, muttering some sarcasm about Bill's not biting with his hind legs.

"Do you think it would be compatible with 'squareness' to take a walk in the moonlight?" Saxe asked.

"Perfectly. Nothing could be more unconventional in every way than my stay up here, — a walk or two in the moonlight can make no difference."

Leduc and Annette were in the cabin.

"But — the squareness?" persisted Saxe teasingly. "Don't you think walks in the moonlight with you may be rather hard on *me?*"

She laughed. "That is *your* look-out. If you choose to risk it, I am ready."

Saxe laughed too. "Oh, I will risk it. I am, you know, as irresponsible as a baby; if I should chance to misbehave, it would be entirely your fault."

"Yes. But — you will not 'chance to misbehave.'"

They struck off through the pines, and soon came out on another part of the old logging-camp road, Saxe whistling "Bonsoir" under his breath. This part of the road was sandy and easier walking. They went on quickly through the mottled shadows. Suddenly Saxe exclaimed: —

"Age tells on different people in such different ways! I hardly realized how old I am, until I saw how hopelessly you bowled me over."

"Is that a sign of age?"

"Certainly not, but there was undeniably something of — senility in my going to bits and making such an ass of myself. Still — it was rather pleasant, so long as it was n't my fault. You are right about that, by the way, though you are young to have learned it. A man never goes any farther than a

woman lets him — except, possibly, in what the poets call a great passion. A great passion is a rare bird nowadays, however, I imagine. Our lives are little, our aims are little, and our loves are little."

He paused, and then, she not answering, went on reflectively: "Or rather, not little, but fleeting. Confoundedly fleeting."

"That is certainly true," she agreed, as they left the road and went down a steep incline toward the little river she had seen from Sunset Ledge.

"True, and — fortunate. 'We forget, not because we will, but because we must,' — Arnold, is n't it? Humiliating, but a tremendous comfort. If I had n't believed it, I should have been pretty desperate last night."

"I knew it, and that is why I have

been able to take it all so calmly, and — to go about with you in this way."

"Ah, you knew it. Women are quick-witted. I wonder if you knew how much I did care — last night?"

"I think I did."

He looked at her profile sharply as they reached the bottom of the ravine.

"I care now, too, you know; even nowadays it does n't go quite as quickly as that" —

"I know. You care a little less than yesterday; to-morrow you will care a little less than to-day" —

"Yes. Though I like you more than any woman I ever knew, and think that we could be the best of friends. Take care!" he broke off, "those stones are very slippery."

Before them lay the plantation of

birch-trees, beautiful beyond description in the moonlight.

"Could we get just within the forest?" she asked; "we can't half see them here. One must look up at the light *through* them; it is the only way to see birches."

They crossed the little river on a row of stepping-stones, climbed the bank, and reached the trees. She walked slowly, her head bent back, stopping now and then.

"Hush! One can hear the wind. In the pine wood I did n't know there was any wind."

He listened. "Yes. It is very pretty. So are you very pretty, if you don't mind my saying so."

She laughed. "Certainly I don't mind, if you really think so."

"I do, and just as an observation,

unbacked by any intention, I may add that I 'd like to kiss you, under your chin!"

There was a kind of labored impertinence in his tone, at which she turned, her eyebrows lifted.

Then, as he drew aside the sweeping branches of a young birch and she passed him, she stopped short with a little cry.

"A grave!"

"The grave of Le Mioche!"

IX

THERE was a pause. Then she turned, her eyes full of tears.

"See the poor white stones!"

Saxe nodded.

The moonlight, circled by the shadows of four large birches, fell full on the little mound. There was no headstone, nothing but the smooth white stones that surrounded it, nearly all of them half hidden in the long grass.

The Countess knelt down and looked at it closely.

"Oh, how pitiful! Think of his coming every year with one of these poor, ridiculous stones. Poor old man!"

"It is the more pitiful when you consider that he was n't old at all when he

began, — that he was living a bad life among bad men." He sat down by her, and took off his hat. "And every year he had at least his one good day."

Her shoulder touched his, and she leaned against it, unnoticing.

"It has been his religion, — and who knows that it has not been a good one? He has prayed here. No Catholic ever quite forgets to pray."

"No. But why would n't he tell?" she asked, stroking the grass gently.

Saxe hesitated, and then, closing his hand over hers, answered in a low voice, "I suppose because it has been his most precious secret for so many years; one hates to give one's most precious secret to — some one one does n't love."

"Yes." She did not move; her hand rested quietly under his.

"And then," he went on, "I think he is ashamed, — ashamed of his real feeling about the little dead child, — ashamed of his sentimentality; men are fools."

She did not answer. The trees rustled softly; a cloud hid the moon for a few seconds, then floated off again; and Le Mioche lay under his thirty-one stones.

"Dear," said Saxe suddenly, "I lied to you on our way here. It was all false, every word of it."

"I know."

"I love you once and for all — shall always love you. I've no right to, but I can't help it, and it is in a way the best of me. I was ashamed of it, like a fool."

"Like Leduc."

"Like Leduc. It — hurt me to know

that I could care so without you caring a — hang."

"My caring would only make matters worse," she said dreamily.

"Yes, of course it would only make matters worse, in one way, and I think I can honestly say I am glad that you do not care."

"If you can say that, you are a very good man."

Her hand tightened a little on his. Putting his arm around her, he drew her close to him.

"I am not a very good man. It is one side of me that can say that, dear. The other side says — My God, I would give my right hand to have you care!"

"That is the worse side."

"As you like. You are a strange woman."

"Am I? In what way?"

Le Mioche was forgotten.

"You know what I am feeling at this minute, and you sit here in my arms as calmly as though I were your grandfather!"

"That is because I do not care, I suppose."

"Yes. Tell me, are you sorry?"

"Sorry — that you care for me, or that I do not care for you?"

"Sorry for *me*. Have you a heart in your body?"

He had not tightened his hold of her by a hair's-breadth, but his voice had changed.

"Yes, I am sorry, if you are unhappy. I have a heart," she answered in a matter-of-fact manner.

He released her, and jumping up suddenly, walked to the opposite side

of the little inclosure, leaning his head against one of the birches.

She sat still for several seconds, and then rose and followed him. He did not move, and she laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't!"

He turned, half laughing. "I 'm not crying, if that 's what you mean."

With a sudden movement, she took off his glasses and turned his face to hers. "Why do you feel so badly?"

"Why? Because I am a man, and I love you, and I want you, and I can't have you. Incidentally, I can't see you without my glasses."

"I know; never mind. Listen. Is it only that, or because I do not love you?"

He bent toward her, half closing his near-sighted eyes as he tried to get her face within focus.

"What is the use of talking about it?" he retorted impatiently. "It may be fun for you to vivisect my feelings, but it is not fun for me. You don't love me, and when I 'm sane, I 'm glad of it. But you torment me beyond endurance. What do you think I am made of?"

He reached for his eyeglasses, but she held them tight.

"No, wait. What do you think *I* 'm made of?"

Saxe laughed. "You! Ice and impeccability."

"Then it has n't occurred to you that I might care too."

He stared at her stupidly. "You care too! You never said so."

"No, I never said so."

"And you certainly have not done anything to make me think you cared."

Vaguely, as in a mist, he saw her face. Without speaking he opened her hand and put on the eyeglasses that dispelled the mist.

"Then — you do care."

"Yes."

She bent her face to his arm and stood there motionless. When she looked up, she was very pale.

Saxe took her hands, as he had done the night before, and kissed them. He was utterly bewildered, and hardly knew what he was about. The feeling that had made him tremble a few minutes before had gone.

"We must go back," he said at length. "It is late."

"Yes? Oh, Le Mioche, Le Mioche!"

With an abandon that half frightened him, she flung herself on the ground

and spread her arms out over the narrow grave. There was, in its perfect spontaneity, nothing theatrical in the act; it expressed her loneliness, hopelessness, her longing to take something to her aching heart. Saxe knew all this as he watched her, immovable. Le Mioche had been dead for more years than she had lived, yet at that minute he was a child, an armful, to her. The man knelt and raised her, holding her gently, her head thrown back against his shoulder. "Dear heart," he said, using the quaint phrase gravely, as though he originated it. She lay quite passive for a minute, and then drawing herself away, rose, and stood unconsciously smoothing her ruffled hair.

"We must go."

"Yes."

They walked slowly away, over the

stepping-stones, up the hill, his arm about her shoulders. As they went down the next slope, it grew darker, the moon having slipped below a bright cloud. Once she stumbled, and as she clung to him to regain her balance, he caught her suddenly to him, bending his head.

Instead of her face, her hands met his cheeks in the darkness and pushed him gently away.

"No, dear."

"Just once!"

"No. Never. I told you because it seemed fairer, but you must not kiss me." They went on in silence, and the next moment the camp-fire glowed through the dark pine-trunks.

X

Saxe slept little that night. At length, toward morning, tired of his hard cot, he dressed and threw himself down on a blanket under the beech-tree. Through the branches the sky gleamed coldly, no color had as yet come to it; the birds were still asleep; it was the quietest hour of the twenty-four. Leduc would sleep for hours yet, his cabin hermetically sealed. Saxe rolled over on his back and something hard hurt his head. He turned down the blanket and found the little heap of pine-cones with which Winifred had played the day before. She loved him. The tumult in his brain was such that he did not know whether he was happy or in despair. She was

going away, but she loved him. A bird chirped in the tree above him. The light in the cabin went out, exhausted; Saxe shuddered at the thought of what the atmosphere in the little room must be. Suddenly he realized that all the birds in the world were singing, that he had been asleep, and that the sun was up.

Tired and aching all over, he fetched a towel and went for a swim, after which a stiff drink of whiskey sent him into a profound sleep that lasted until Leduc awoke him by hobbling into the tent and calling him. It was eight o'clock, and Leduc had been afraid M'sieu might have died in his sleep. That sometimes happens. Breakfast was ready, and Leduc's foot was better. After breakfast, Leduc would have something to tell M'sieu.

Before they had finished breakfast, however, young Cobb came in with a note. Saxe opened it.

DEAR DR. SAXE, — I am going away to-day. Annette will stay as long as she likes, and then join me in New York. You will understand, and forgive me. Good-by, — and God bless you.

"There 's an answer, she said," announced Cobb, eating a piece of Leduc's fried pork. "I c'n wait."

Saxe went into his tent and let down the flap. The note he sent back was shorter than hers.

DEAR COUNTESS, — You know best. I have nothing to forgive, much to bless you for. R. S.

It was over, then, he thought, resolutely finishing his breakfast. It had to come to this end, and after a bit the relief would follow. He lit a pipe and stretched himself out under a tree, as he had done every day since he had been there.

Leduc fussed about, grumbling over his foot, singing, whistling, carrying things to and from the cabin. Everything was just as usual, apparently. When Saxe was halfway through his second pipe, the old man came and sat down by him.

"Will M'sieu be so good and look at my foot?"

"Yes," grunted Saxe.

Leduc pulled off the slit boot, and displayed a yellow woolen stocking with neither heel nor toe.

"Did she find the socks?" asked Saxe.

"No, M'sieu. She gave me up."

Saxe pulled off the sock, and pronounced the foot well enough for moderate use. Suddenly he remembered. "Quite well enough for you to walk to the grave of Le Mioche," he added sharply.

Leduc started. "It is not so far, but it is not so near," he stammered in French.

"Oh, damn! I tell you I know all about it, Leduc. I 've seen it. I know just where it is."

The old man flushed, a slow red that burned painfully through his brown skin. "M'sieu knows, — M'sieu has seen" —

"Yes. The white stones are very pretty, mon vieux."

Leduc sat without moving, the ragged sock loose in his hands. "The white

stones, — M'sieu likes them? M'sieu did not laugh?"

"Why should I laugh, Leduc?"

"Thirty-one years is a long time. I was young then, I am old now," the old man answered in French, as he drew on the sock. "No one here knows; I have never told; they would have mocked me. Pauv' Mioche!"

His brilliant blue eyes were dimmed with tears that did not fall. Saxe had seen tears rolling down his cheeks, but these were different. After a pause the younger man said gently: —

"Why would n't you show Annette? And why did you pretend it was so far?"

Leduc laughed aloud. "'Not so near, but not so far!' She would have found it not so near, if I had taken her, for I meant to go to it by way of Everett."

"But Everett is sixty miles from here."

"Yes. I would have taken her by train to West Garfield, then to Everett, and back by train as far as Clinton. Then we 'd have hired a wagon" — He broke off, smiling in delight at his clever scheme.

"You had no right to do such a thing, and I won't have it; do you hear me?"

Leduc shrugged his shoulders and rose slowly. "Eh, mon Dieu, I had given it up. She would have spoiled it all. She 'd have cut the grass and put up a gravestone, and cried over the mound. It is my grave, I tell you! I tended it for years while she was in France. *I* never forgot it. Wherever I was, I came back every year to put a stone on it. It is n't hers, and she shan't go to it."

There was a certain dignity in his selfishness that appealed to Saxe.

"You will have to take her, though," he said sympathetically.

Leduc drew himself up to his full height and looked down at the man in whose hands were, so to say, dogs and presents of money.

"No, M'sieu," he said, relapsing into his half-breed dialect. "Leduc not have to. Leduc going away."

"Going away!"

"Oui, M'sieu. Leduc has been thinking, and he is going away north."

"But that is nonsense. In the first place, I could take Annette to the grave if I chose. Your going can't change that."

The old man's face twitched suddenly. "M'sieu will not do that.

Surely M'sieu will not do that! It is all I have."

Saxe hesitated, and then, rising suddenly, held out his hand. "Look here, Leduc. I promise not to tell, if you promise not to go."

"Not tell?"

"No. I'll not tell, if you 'll stay until to-morrow."

After an instant's deliberation Leduc promised, and Saxe went off on his suddenly conceived errand.

He found Annette at the hotel, and learned that her mistress was to go by the afternoon train, and was now in the wood across the road, taking a walk. Saxe found her where he had known she would be, seated on the log where he and she had sat a few nights before.

She was very pale and looked worn, as if from a sleepless night.

"Do not scold me for coming," he began at once. "I am not here on my account. You must not go until to-morrow."

XI

"I REMEMBER," began the Countess, gazing dreamily into the glowing ashes, "a story that Annette — 'Nana,' I called her then — used to tell me when I was very little."

No one spoke; no one had spoken for some time. Something, possibly the blending of the moonlight with the fire-light, had quieted them all, and then the pines, stirred by a soft overhead wind, were more than usually articulate.

"It was the story of a little boy," she went on after a pause, her hands clasped about her knees. "She never told me his name. One day when I was ill, she showed me a curl of his hair in a locket, — such yellow hair, and so silky."

Leduc looked up from his whittling, his eyes glinting under the heavy brows.

"He must have been a dear little boy," the Countess continued, looking absently at him. "He was lame. One poor little leg was shorter than the other, and his back was not quite straight, but only his father and mother cared; *he* did n't, because they were so good to him, and he was so happy."

Saxe watched her, hardly hearing her words as the pine-cones he tossed into the dying fire blazed up and threw a vivid light over her.

He had walked all the afternoon, tramping doggedly over the roughest ground he could find, and he was tired, both mentally and physically; his feelings were deadened, in a comfortable way, so that he was almost happy.

"The father, a big, strong man, used to knot an old shawl — a blue and green plaid shawl it was, I remember — about his neck as Indian women do, and the little boy would sit in the shawl with his hands clasped just under his father's chin, — and away they would gallop through the woods! The little boy used to pretend that his father was a horse, — named" — She broke off. "I have forgotten the name!"

"'Bucéphale.'"

It was Leduc who spoke, his voice harsh. Saxe turned to him. The old man had dropped his whittling and drawn back out of the firelight, only his big knotted hands, lying helplessly open, palm uppermost, with loose-curled fingers, being distinctly visible. There was something very pathetic about those hands.

The Countess's eyes met Saxe's, and held them for a minute, until the changing expression of his startled her, and she turned away with a slight shake of the head.

"The little boy was very fond of his mother, but he loved his father even more, and when he was ill, as he was very often, he used to rest best when his father lay him on a pillow and carried him up and down before the cottage where they lived. He used to kiss his father's hair, and pat it with his hot hands. I have often thought," went on the Countess, in another voice, speaking very meditatively, "that it must have made the poor mother unhappy to have the little boy love his father so much more than he loved her."

"I loved him more than she loved him, always!" exclaimed Leduc fierce-

ly, rising with clenched hands. "She hated his being lame. She was proud, ma femme, and resented his crooked leg. All her people were tall and straight, and — she blamed me. I always loved him the more, — I was a scamp, and a lame child was good enough for me."

Annette sat with a white face and tight-clasped hands, looking at him, but he was not talking to her.

"I know," he went on, still in French; "you want me to take her to his grave; you are trying to work on my feelings. You have done it, I — you have hurt me. But she shall not see it. It is mine, and she shall not spoil it."

"Lucien, — I would not spoil it, I only want to see it," pleaded the old woman, rising too and going to him. The others were forgotten. "Why do

you hate me so? I did love him. God knows I loved him. I never tried to make him love me more than you. It hurt, but — I was glad. I thought it might help you."

Leduc looked down at her with a curious dignity. "If you loved him, why did you leave him all alone?"

"Lucien!" Her voice rose to a trembling cry. "I never left him, never a minute, except when you had him, and I knew — he did n't want me."

It was perhaps the most heart-breaking avowal a woman could make, and Saxe started up, his face hot.

"Leduc!" he began, but Winifred stopped him with a gesture. He caught her hand and they stood there, reverential, unnoticed observers of the strange scene.

The pile of shavings and the stick for-

gotten by the old man caught fire from a spark, and threw flitting flames upon the figures of the two speakers.

"I meant, — why did you leave him after he was dead? He was afraid of the dark, he was afraid of the trees when the wind blew, — he was afraid of the black shadows rushing over the ground. He thought they were beasts. And you left him alone, — alone with all these things!"

Annette laid her hands on his arm. "But — he was dead, he did n't know; he was n't there, he was with the Blessed Virgin and the saints."

Leduc shook her off.

"Contes que tout cela! He was there, — there in the black earth under the shadows. He is there still. And you left him alone."

Winifred's hand closed more tightly

over Saxe's. Leduc's obstinacy seemed invincible.

There was a short silence, while the old woman, her face hidden by her hands, rocked to and fro without speaking.

Then, leaving Saxe, Winifred approached the old man.

"Leduc," she said, gently using Saxe's name for him, "don't you believe in Heaven and the Blessed Virgin?"

"Do you, Mademoiselle?"

She flushed. "Yes, I do. I believe that Le Mioche has been there with her all these years."

"Then you don't believe in Purgatory?" he broke in.

"No. I don't know, — but I believe in God, — and I know that God would n't leave le pauvre Mioche all alone there all these years. Annette is a good

Catholic; she has not forgotten him, but she has not thought of him as in his grave; she has thought of him as being in Heaven. Do you see?"

"I did n't leave him all alone. I loved him," he muttered, a little irresolutely, and then, drawing a long breath, she went on: —

"Annette, Leduc — I mean Lucien — has gone every year to the grave. Every year, no matter where he was, and laid on it a white stone in memory of his visit. The grave has been taken care of by him. You have prayed for Le Mioche, you have not forgotten him, but — you did forget his grave."

Annette uncovered her face. "Yes, I did. Lucien, — will you forgive me, my man, and let me see it? It is yours; I will not touch it. But — oh, Le Mioche, Le Mioche!"

She burst into hard, painful sobs, and went up to him. Winifred drew back quietly and waited.

"Annette, ma vieille, don't cry. Come, I will show you. You are not to cut the grass, — you are to remember that it is mine, but — I will let you see it. Come."

The old woman raised her head. "To-night?" she asked in amazement.

Leduc put his arm about her shoulders. His eyes were wet, but there was condescension in every movement as he led her away.

"To-night. It is n't so near," he added, with an unsteady laugh, "but then, it is n't so far."

XII

THE other two, left alone, sat down again, and Saxe mechanically threw some cones and sticks on the fire.

"A very curious scene, was n't it?" Winifred said thoughtfully. "I wonder how far it is possible to love, after thirty years, a child who died at the age of four."

"It was n't only the child," returned Saxe in the same reflective tone, "it was their youth, their old love and old dislike for each other, — their vanity, their obstinacy, — all of it together."

"He was offended at the thought of her having left *him*, quite as much as by her having left Le Mioche, — and

she was irritated, in a way, by his faithfulness to the grave."

Saxe watched her absently. "Yes. Oh, yes," he answered.

"The beginning of the trouble," she went on, "was that Lucien threw her down once, when he was drunk. Le Mioche was born a few months after, — lame. She blamed her husband, and said cruel things to him, poor woman; it was hard for her, and then, from the first, the little fellow preferred his father."

Saxe did not speak, and for a time she too was silent; then, a little hastily: "I am glad I stayed. It will be a comfort to her, poor thing, as long as she lives, that she saw the grave, and that at the end they were — kind to each other."

Saxe laughed. "Yes. Only, — you

must go by the early train. Leduc's emotionality will not last."

"I know. Yes, we will take the early train. Tell me, Dr. Saxe, what is the best hotel in Boston? We shall stop over night there."

"The Touraine, I should say."

"Thanks. It would be easy to go direct to New York, I suppose, but I like to be comfortable, and I confess I don't find your much lauded dining-room cars up to their reputation!"

"I never lauded them."

"I don't mean you personally, of course. I mean all Americans in Europe. Americans are so tremendously patriotic in Europe."

Saxe frowned impatiently.

"Hang Americans in Europe!" he exclaimed, throwing a branch into the fire with a force that sent a shower of

ashes and sparks out into the darkness. An owl hooted.

She laughed softly. "How very rude you are!"

He did not answer, and again they were silent, neither looking at the other. The moonlight no longer reached them, and the night was dark but for the red firelight; the wind had gone down, and silence brooded on the quiet trees.

At last, without moving, Saxe spoke.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "why women have their feelings so much better under control than men. It is either that they have better disciplined wills, or — less strength of feeling."

"The latter, I should say," she answered. "Women are weaker physically and mentally than men, — why not emotionally?"

"You must be right. Probably if

you were at this moment feeling one tenth of what I feel, you would cry out."

"Probably. So it is just as well that matters are as they are."

Saxe watched her as she spoke. "Yes. It may interest you to know," he went on in the same even voice, "that if I were not convinced of the cowardice of such an act, I should shoot myself to-night."

"I am glad that you are convinced of the cowardice of such an act. You are also probably convinced, as I am, of the fleeting nature of most emotions. What is the song Leduc sings: 'Un peu d'amour, un peu de haine, et puis'" —

"'Et puis bonsoir!' Yes."

"To-night you are — sorry I am going, — but in a month you will be glad

I did go, and in giving you a month I am unnecessarily generous."

"I shall be glad to-morrow, as far as that is concerned, but — it will all hurt none the less."

"It hurts me, too," she said, relenting a little, and then sorry, as he laughed.

"My dear child! Thank you; you are kind. It may hurt you a little; I believe that it will, — but you are young, and this is the last of my youth."

"Nonsense! You are forty-two!"

"Yes. But this is the last, as it was almost the first, of my youth. You are young, and I am old. That is the difference."

She started as if to speak, and then was silent, her chin in her hand, the fingers edged with flame in the firelight.

At length she turned, looking full at him for the first time.

"When I told you that I loved you, what did you think I meant?"

"I knew. I knew" —

"But you think that I, a woman of nearly thirty, a woman who has been eating her heart out in a horrible loneliness for years, did not know what I was saying. That I loved you for a week, for a month. That — all this — has been a pleasant little romantic episode on which I should look back with a smile, — you thought all these things, because I can talk and laugh, and — ask you about — hotels? In a word, because I do not mourn and sentimentalize, as you would like to have me."

"Stop! I never wanted you to mourn and" —

"Wait. Now, just before I go away, — and it is to be 'bonsoir,' — I must tell you, in a way that you will remem-

ber, that I love you with every bit of me, and that as long as I live I shall love you."

She leaned over, laying one hand on his arm. With a sort of groan he shook her off.

"Don't touch me," he said breathlessly.

He rose, and walked up and down for a few seconds without speaking.

"God bless you for saying that," he went on, as she rose, facing him. "The worst of it is that it hurts you. I wish I could have it all."

She smiled. "No, dearest, I would not give up my share. It is a sorrow sweeter than all the happiness in the world. It is the best thing in the world" —

Suddenly she reached out and took off his glasses, as she had done at the

grave of Le Mioche. His eyes were wet.

They were hard, brilliant eyes, of a kind to which such moisture looks almost impossible.

With a little cry she hid her face on his arm and held it there until, breathing hard, he turned his head and kissed her.

"Ah, it is hard, it is hard," she cried, holding him tight. "I cannot say 'Bonsoir' — I cannot."

He laid his hand on her hair. "Dear, — we must. It is no good, we must."

Her little outburst of passion was spent. "Yes. Of course we must. Hush, — there they come. We must take the first train, — for it is n't only Leduc whose mood will not last" —

Leduc was singing as they came, a song they both knew. "'Ah, vous dirais-je Maman'" —

"Le Mioche loved it," whispered Winifred. "Richard, — promise me on your word of honor never to write to me."

"I promise on my word of honor."

"Even if I — should write — you."

"Even if — I cannot!"

"You *must!*"

"Even if you should write to me."

In the darkness they waited.

"'Papa veut que je raisonne'" — Annette was singing with him.

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

"'Bonsoir,'" added Winifred.

"'Bonsoir!'"

"Here 's the lantern, Leduc; light it, it is late."

"Oui, M'sieu."

"So you saw the grave, Annette?"

"Yes, Mad'moiselle. The trees have

grown big, but they are the same trees. And we are grown old, but we are the same people."

"We must go to-morrow morning, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know," returned the old woman composedly. "It is best. To-night we have been very happy, but we are the same people we used to be, — to-morrow we should quarrel. We are old, and I suppose we shall never meet again. It is better so, — but this night will always be a happy memory."

Winifred turned as they left the camp, and looked back at the now lonely fire. For a second she stood quite still, and then followed Leduc and Annette, who carried the lantern.

"Hotel Touraine, you said," she remarked, as they reached the wagon and Leduc waked young Cobb.

"Yes. It is a very good one. I hope you will have a pleasant summer."

"Thanks. All good wishes for your books, and — the laboratory."

Leduc embraced his wife with a kind of tender gallantry not unmixed with relief, and the two women got into the wagon.

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

Cobb flapped the reins on the back of his horse, and the wagon started with a jerk.

When it was almost out of sight, Winifred called softly, —

"'Bonsoir.'"

"'Bonsoir.'"

Leduc sighed ostentatiously. "Mon Dieu, mon Dieu. 'Bonsoir' reminds me of the song."

As they went back, following the

dancing light of the lantern, the old man raised his voice and sang cheerfully: —

"'La vie est brève,
Un peu d'espoir,
Un peu de rêve,
Et puis — bonsoir!'

That is very true, M'sieu. Leduc has found it very true, and Leduc is old, and knows."

Saxe laughed.

"Leduc is a very wise man. Does he know, among other things, where the whiskey is?"

As he poured out a glass by the lantern's light, Saxe laughed again.

"'Et puis — bonsoir!'"

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